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I am a heritage because I bring you years of thought and the lore of time — I impart yet I can not speak — I have traveled among the peoples of the earth — I am a rover — Oft-times I stray from the fireside of the one who loves and cherishes me - who misses me when I am gone — Should you find me vagrant please send me home - among my brothers - on the book shelves of .....

ALFRED SANTELL

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BY
THE RT. HON. JOHN MORLEY

"STAY, BARBARIAN, HE IS MY SON"

FORTY-THREE VOLUMES

[illegible]

VOLUME XV

AKRON, OHIO
THE WERNER COMPANY
[illegible]

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FORTY-THREE VOLUMES

ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-EIGHT DESIGNS, COMPRISING REPRODUCTIONS
OF RARE OLD ENGRAVINGS, STEEL PLATES, PHOTOGRAVURES,
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VOLUME XV

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1906

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THE DRAMATIC WORKS

OF

VOLTAIRE

IN FIVE VOLUMES

VOL. I

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MÉROPE

MÉROPE.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MÉROPE, Widow of Cresphontes, King of Messene.
ÆGISTHUS, Son of Mérope.
POLIPHONTES, Tyrant of Messene.
NARBAS, an old Man.
EURICLES, Favorite of Mérope.
EROX, Favorite of Poliphontes.
ISMENIA, Confidante of Mérope.

SCENE AT MESSENE, in the Palace of Mérope.

"Mérope," produced in 1743, is the greatest of Voltaire's tragedies and a perfect literary performance. Frederick the Great amused himself by turning it into the libretto of an opera. Its success was great and the author was called before the curtain, an honor until then unknown in France. The interest of the following correspondence justifies its length.

A Letter to the Marquis Scipio Maffei, Author of the Italian Mérope, and many other celebrated performances.

Sir: The Greeks and Romans, to whom modern Italy, as well as all other nations, are indebted for almost everything, dedicated their works, without the ridiculous form of compliments, to their friends, who were masters of the art: by this claim I take the liberty of addressing to you the French *"Mérope."*

The Italians, who have been the restorers of almost all the fine arts, and the inventors of many, were the first, who, under the auspices of Leo X., revived tragedy; and you, sir, are the first who, in this age, when the Sophoclean art became enervated by love-intrigues, often foreign to the subject, and so often debased by idle buffooneries, that reflected dishonor on the taste of your ingenious countrymen, you, sir, were the first who had courage and genius enough to hazard a tragedy without gallantry, a tragedy worthy of Athens in its glory; wherein the maternal affection constitutes the whole intrigue, and the most tender interest arises from the purest virtue. France prides herself in her *"Athalie";* it is indeed the masterpiece of our stage, perhaps of poetry itself: of all the pieces that are exhibited among us, it is the only one where love is not introduced: but at the same time we must allow, that it is supported by the pomp of religion, and that majesty of eloquence which appears in the prophets. You had not that resource, and yet you have so contrived, as to furnish out five acts, which it is so

extremely difficult to fill up without episodes. I must own, your subject appeared to me much more interesting and tragical than that of *"Athalie";* and even if our admirable Racine had worked up his masterpiece with more art, more poetry, and more sublimity than he has, yours, I am satisfied, would have drawn more tears from the audience.

The preceptor of Alexander—kings ought always to have such preceptors—the great Aristotle, that extensive genius, so just, and so deeply versed in all the learning of those times, Aristotle, in his art of poetry, has declared that the meeting of *Mérope* and her son was the most interesting circumstance of the whole Grecian theatre. This stroke was, in his opinion, infinitely superior to all the rest. Plutarch tells us, that the Greeks, who, of all the people in the world, had the quickest feeling, trembled with fear, lest the old man who was to stop the arm of *Mérope,* should not come in time enough. That piece, which was played in his time, and a few fragments of which are still extant, appeared to him the most affecting of all the tragedies of Euripides; but it was not the choice of his subject alone to which that poet owed his success, though in every species of the drama, a happy choice is, no doubt, of the greatest service.

France has seen several *"Méropes,"* but none of them ever succeeded: the authors perhaps overloaded this simple subject with foreign ornaments: it was the naked *"Venus"* of Praxiteles which they wanted to cover with tinsel. It requires a great deal of time to teach men that everything which is great should be simple and natural. In 1641, when the French flag began to flourish, and even to raise itself above that of Greece, by the genius of P.

Corneille, Cardinal Richelieu, who ambitiously sought for glory of every kind, and who had just then built a magnificent hall, for theatrical representations, in the Palais Royal, of which he had himself furnished the design, had a *"Mérope"* played there under the name of *"Telephonte";* the plot of it is generally believed to have been entirely his own. There are about a hundred verses in it, supposed to be written by him; the rest was by Colletet, Bois-Roberts, Desmarets, and Chapelain; but all the power of Cardinal Richelieu could not impart to those writers that genius which they never possessed: his own was not indeed adapted to the stage, though he had a good taste; so that all he could do, or that could be expected from him, was to patronize and encourage the great Corneille.

Mr. Gilbert, resident of the celebrated Queen Christina, in 1643, gave us his *"Mérope,"* which is at present as little known as the other. La Chapelle, of the French academy, author of a tragedy called *"Cléopatre,"* which was played with some success, gave us another *"Mérope"* in 1683, and took care to insert a love episode: he complains withal in his preface, that the critics reproached him with too great a degree of the marvellous; but he was mistaken, it was not the marvellous that sank his performance, but in reality the want of genius, added to the coldness and insipidity of his versification; this is the great point, the capital fault, that condemns so many poems to oblivion.

The art of eloquence in verse is of all arts the most difficult and the most uncommon: there are a thousand geniuses to be found who can plan a work, and put it into verse after the common manner; but to treat it like a true poet, is a talent which

is seldom bestowed on above two or three men on the face of the whole earth.

In December, 1701, M. de la Grange played his *"Amasis,"* which is nothing more than the subject of *"Mérope"* under another name. Gallantry has its share in this performance likewise; and there is more of the marvellous in it than even in La Chapelle's: but it is more interesting, conducted with more art and genius, and written with more warmth and power; notwithstanding which, it met with no great success;

Et habent sua fata libelli.

Since that, however, it has been revived with great applause; and is one of those few pieces which generally give pleasure in the representation.

Before and after *"Amasis"* we have had several tragedies on subjects very nearly resembling this, wherein a mother is going to avenge the death of her son on the son himself, and discovers him just at the instant when she was about to kill him. We frequently saw on our stage that striking but rarely probable situation, wherein a person comes with a poniard in his hand ready to destroy his enemy, and another arrives at the same instant, and snatches it from him. This incident recommended, at least for a time, the *"Camma"* of Thomas Corneille.

But amongst all the tragedies on this subject, which I have here enumerated, there is not one of them but is filled with some episode of love, or rather gallantry; for everything must give way to the reigning taste. But you must not believe, sir, that this unhappy custom of loading our tragedies with ridiculous love-intrigues was owing to Racine; a crime, which, in Italy, I know he is generally

reproached with: on the contrary, he did everything in his power to reform the public taste in this particular: the passion of love is never brought in by him as a mere episode; it is the foundation or ground-plot of all his pieces, and forms the principal interest: it is certainly of all the passions the most truly theatrical, the most fruitful in sentiments, and admits of the greatest variety: it ought, therefore, no doubt, to be the soul of a dramatic performance, or entirely to be banished from it: if love is not tragical, it is insipid; and when it is tragical, it should reign alone; it was never made for a second place. It was Rotrou, or rather we must own, the great Corneille himself, who, in his creation of the stage, at the same time disfigured and disgraced it, by those ridiculous intrigues, bespoken, as it were, and made on purpose, those affairs of gallantry, which not being true passions, were unworthy of the stage; if you would know the reason why Corneille's tragedies are so seldom played, the reason is plain enough: it is because, in his *"Otho,"*

"Otho makes a compliment to his mistress more like a man of wit than a real lover: he follows step by step the effort of his memory, which it is much more easy to admire than to believe. *Camille* herself seemed to be of his opinion; she would have liked much better a discourse less studied.—Tell me then, when *Otho* made love to *Camille,* was he contented, or was she kind?"

It is because in, *"Pompey," Cleopatra*—a useless character—says that *Cæsar* "sighs for her," and in a plaintive style calls himself "her captive, even in the field of victory."

It is because *Cæsar* asks *Antony* if he has seen

this "adorable queen": to which Antony replies, "Yes, my lord, I have seen her, she is incomparable."

It is because, in *"Sertorius,"* old *Sertorius* falls in love, not only because he likes the lady, but with a political view, and cries out: "I love: but it suits my age so ill to be in love, that I even conceal it from the fair one who has charmed me, as I know that the deep and yellow wrinkles on my forehead can have no great power in captivating the senses."

It is because, in *"Œdipus," Theseus* begins by saying to *Dirce,* "Whatever dreadful havoc the plague may make here, absence to true lovers is far more dreadful."

In a word, it is because such love as this will never make us shed tears; and when that passion does not affect us, it must be quite insipid.

I have said no more here, sir, than what all good judges, and men of taste, say to one another every day; what you have often heard at my house; in short, what everybody thinks, but none dare to publish: you know well enough the nature of mankind: half the world write in opposition to their own opinions, for fear of shocking received prejudices and vulgar errors. With regard to myself, who have never mixed any political reserve with my sentiments on literature, I speak the truth boldly, and will add, that I respect Corneille more, and have a higher opinion of the real merit of this great father of the stage, than those who praise him indiscriminately, and are blind to all his faults.

A *"Mérope"* was exhibited at London in 1731: who would have thought a love-intrigue could ever have been thought of at that time? But ever since the reign of Charles II. love has taken possession of the English stage; though there is not a

nation upon earth by whom that passion is so ill painted; but the intrigue so absurdly brought in, and so badly treated, is the least fault of the English *"Mérope."* The young *Ægisthus,* delivered out of prison by a maid of honor, who is in love with him, is brought before the queen, who presents him with a bowl of poison, and a dagger, and speaks thus to him: "If you don't swallow the poison, this dagger shall put an end to your mistress' life." The young man drinks the poison, and is carried off in the agonies of death: he comes back in the fifth act coldly to inform *Mérope* that he is her son, and that he has slain the tyrant. *Mérope* asks him how this miracle was performed: to which he replies, that a friend of the maid of honor had put poppy-water, instead of poison, into the cup. "I was only asleep," says he, "when they thought me dead; I learned, when I awaked, that I was your son, and immediately killed the tyrant." Thus ends the tragedy; no doubt but it met with a bad reception: but is it not strange that it should ever have been represented? Is it not a proof that the English stage is not yet refined? It seems as if the same cause that deprives the English of any excellency in, or genius for, music and painting, takes from them also all perfection in tragedy. This island, which has produced the finest philosophers in the world, is not equally productive of the fine arts; and if the English do not seriously apply themselves to the study of those precepts which were given them by their excellent countrymen, Addison and Pope, they will never come near to other nations in point of taste and literature.

But whilst the subject of *"Mérope"* has been thus disgraced and disfigured in one part of Europe, it

has met with better fate in Italy, where it has for a long time been treated in the true taste of the ancients. In this sixteenth century, which will be famous throughout all ages, the Count de Torelli gave us his *"Mérope"* with choruses. If in La Chapelle's tragedy we find all the faults of the French stage, such as useless intrigues, episodes, and a romantic air; and in the English author the highest degree of indecency, barbarism, and absurdity; we likewise meet in the Italian with all the faults of the Greek theatre, such as the want of action, and declamation. You, sir, have avoided all the rocks which they split upon; you, who have done honor to your country, by complete models of more than one kind, you have given us in your *"Mérope"* an example of a tragedy that is at once both simple and interesting.

The moment I read it I was struck with it; my love to my own country has never shut my eyes against the merit of foreigners. On the other hand, the more regard I have for it, the more I endeavor to enrich it, by the addition of treasures that are not of its own growth. The desire which I had of translating your *"Mérope,"* was increased by the honor of a personal acquaintance with you at Paris, in the year 1733. By loving the author, I became still more enamored with his work; but when I sat down to it, I found it was impossible to bring it on the French stage. We are grown excessively delicate: like the Sybarites of old, we are so immersed in luxury, that we cannot bear that rustic simplicity, and that description of a country life, which you have imitated from the Greek theatre. I am afraid our audiences would not suffer young *Ægisthus* to make a present of his ring to the man that stops

him. I could not have ventured to seize upon a hero, and take him for a robber; though, at the same time, the circumstances he is in authorize the mistake. Our manners, which probably admit of many things which yours do not, would not permit us to represent the tyrant, the murderer of *Mérope's* husband and children, pretending, after fifteen years, to be in love with her; nor could I even have dared to make the queen say to him, "Why did not you talk to me of love before, when the bloom of youth was yet on my face?" Conversations of this kind are natural; but our pit, which at some times is so indulgent, and at others so nice and delicate, would think them perhaps too familiar, and might even discover coquetry, where, in reality, there might be nothing but what was just and proper. Our stage would by no means have suffered *Mérope* to bind her son to a pillar, nor to run after him with a javelin, and an axe in her hand, nor have permitted the young man to run away from her twice, and beg his life of the tyrant: much less could we have suffered the confidante of *Mérope* to have persuaded *Ægisthus* to go to sleep on the stage, merely to give the queen an opportunity of coming there to assassinate him: not but all this is natural: but you must pardon us for expecting that nature should always be presented to us with some strokes of art; strokes that are extremely different at Paris from those which we meet with at Verona.

To give you a proper idea of the different taste and judgment of polite and cultivated nations, with regard to the same arts, permit me here to quote a few passages from your own celebrated performance, which seem dictated by pure nature. The

person who stops young *Cresphontes,* and takes the ring from him, says:

Or dunque in tuo paese i servi
Han di coteste gemme? un bel paese
Sia questo tuo; nel nostro una tal gemma
Ad un dito real non sconverebbe.

I will take the liberty to translate this into blank verse, in which your tragedy is written, as I have not time at present to work it into rhyme.

Have slaves such precious jewels where thou livest?
Sure 'tis a noble country; for, with us,
Such rings might well adorn a royal hand.

The tyrant's confidant tells him, when speaking of the queen, who refuses, after twenty years, to marry the known murderer of her family:

La donna, come sai, ricusa e brama
Women, we know, refuse when most they love.

The queen's waiting-woman answers the tyrant, who presses her to use her influence in his favor, thus:

———*dissimulato in vano*
Soffre di febre assalto; alquanti giorni
Donare e forza a rinfrancar suoi spiriti.

The queen, sir, has a fever, 'tis in vain
To hide it, and her spirits are oppressed;
She must have time to recollect them.

In your fourth act, old *Polydore* asks one of *Mérope's* courtiers who he is? To which he replies, "I am *Eurises,* the son of *Nicander.*" *Polydore* then, speaking of *Nicander,* talks in the style of Homer's *Nestor.*

———————Egli cra humano
Eliberal, quando appariva, tutti
Faceangli honor; io mi ricordo ancora
Diquanto ei festeggio con bella pompa
Le sue nozze con Silvia, ch'era figlia
D'Olimpia e di Glicon fratel d'Ipparcho.
Ju dunque sir quel fanciullin che in corte
Silvia condur solea quasi per pompa;
Parmi' l'altir hieri: O quanto siete presti,
Quanto voi v'affrettate, O giovinetti,
A farvi adulti ed a gridar tacendo
Che noi diam loco!

The most humane, most generous of mankind,
Where'er he went, respected and beloved:
O I remember well the feast he gave
When to his Sylvia wedded, the fair daughter
Of Glycon, brother of the brave Hipparchus,
And chaste Olympia: and art thou that infant
Whom Sylvia to the court so often brought
And fondled in her arms? alas! methinks
It was but yesterday: how quickly youth
Shoots up, and tells us we must quit the scene!

In another place the same old man, being invited to the ceremony of the queen's marriage, says:

———————Oh curioso
Punto io non son, passo stagione. Assai
Veduti ho sacrificii; io mi recordo
Di quello ancora quando il re Cresphonte
Incomincio a regnar. Quella fu pompa.
Ora piu non si fanno a questi tempi
Di cotai sacrificii. Piu di cento
Fur le beste sivenate i sacerdoti
Risplendean tutti, ed ove ti volgessi
Altro non si vedea che argento ed oro.

My time is past, and curiosity
Is now no more: already I have seen
Enough of nuptial rites, enough of pomp

And sacrifice: I still remember well
The great solemnity, when King Cresphontes
Began his reign: O 'twas a noble sight!
We cannot boast of such in these our days:
A hundred beasts were offered up, the priests
In all their splendor shone, and naught was seen
But gold and silver.———

All these strokes are natural, all agreeable to the characters and manners represented: such familiar dialogues would, no doubt, have been well received at Athens; but Paris and our pit expect a simplicity of another kind. We may, perhaps, even boast of a more refined taste than Athens itself, where, though the principal city of all Greece, it does not appear to me that they ever represented any theatrical pieces except on the four solemn festivals; whereas at Paris there is always more than one every day in the year. At Athens the number of citizens was computed at only ten thousand, and Paris has nearly eight hundred thousand inhabitants; among whom, I suppose, we may reckon thirty thousand judges of dramatic performances, who really do pass their judgments almost every day of their lives.

In your tragedy you took the liberty to translate that elegant and simple comparison from Virgil.

Qualis populea maerens Philomela sub umbra
Amissos queritur fœtus.

But if I were to take the same in mine, they would say it was fitter for an epic poem: such a rigid master have we to please in what we call the public:

Nescis, heu! nescis nostra fastidia Romae:
Et pueri nasum Rhinocerontis habent.

The English have a custom of finishing almost all their acts with a simile; but we expect that, in a tragedy, the hero should talk, and not the poet. Our audience is of opinion that in an important crisis of affairs, in a council, in a violent passion, or a pressing danger, princes and ministers should never make poetical comparisons.

How could I ever venture to make the under characters talk together for a long time? With you, those conversations serve to prepare interesting scenes between the principal actors: they are like the avenues to a fine palace: but our spectators are for coming into it at once. We must therefore comply with the national taste, which is, perhaps, grown more difficult, from having been cloyed, as it were, with such a variety of fine performances: and yet among these recitals, which our excessive severity condemns, how many beauties do I regret the loss of! How does simple nature delight me, though beneath a form that appears strange to us!

I have here, sir, given you some of those reasons which prevailed on me not to follow what I so much admired. I was obliged, not without regret, to write a new *"Mérope"*; I have done it in a different manner, but I am far from thinking that I have therefore done it better. I look upon myself, with regard to you, as a traveller to whom an eastern monarch had made a present of some very rich stuffs: the king would certainly permit this traveller to wear them according to the fashion of his own country.

My *"Mérope"* was finished in the beginning of the year 1736, pretty nearly as it now stands; studies of another kind prevented me from bringing it on the stage: but what weighed most with me was,

the hazard which I ran in producing it, after several successful pieces on almost the same subject, though under different names. At length, however, I ventured to produce it, and the public gave me a convincing proof that they could condescend to see the same matter worked up in a different manner. That happened to our stage which we see every day in a gallery of pictures, where there are many of them on exactly the same subject. The judges are pleased by the observation of these different manners, and everyone marks down and enjoys, according to his own taste, the character of every painter. This is a kind of happy concurrence, which, at the same time that it contributes towards the perfection of the Art, gives the public a better insight into it. If the French *"Mérope"* has met with the same success as the Italian, it is to you, sir, I am indebted for it; to that simplicity in your performance which I have taken for my model, and which I was always an admirer of. Though I walked in a different path, you were always my guide. I could have wished, after the examples of the Italians and English, to employ the happy facility of blank verse, and have often called to mind this passage of *"Rucellai"*:

Tu sai purche l' imagine della voce
Che risponde da i sassi, dove l' echo alberga.
Sempre nemica fu del nostro regno,
E fu inventrice delle prime rime.

But I am satisfied, as I have long since declared, that such an attempt would never succeed in France, and it would be rather a mark of weakness than good sense, to endeavor to shake off a yoke which so many authors have borne, whose works will last

as long as the nation itself. Our poetry has none of those liberties which yours has; and this is perhaps one of the reasons why the Italians got the start of us, by three or four centuries, in this most difficult and most delightful art.

As I have endeavored to imitate you in tragedy, I should be glad to follow your example in other branches of literature, for which you are so eminently distinguished: I could wish to form my taste by yours in the science of history; I do not mean the empty, barren knowledge of dates and facts, that only informs us at what period of time a man died, who perhaps was a useless or a pernicious member of society; the science of lexicography, that loads the memory without improving the mind; I mean that history of the human heart which teaches us men and manners, which leads us from error to error, and from prejudice to prejudice, into the effects of the various passions and affections that agitate mankind: which shows us all the evils that ignorance, or knowledge misapplied, has produced in the world; and which, above all, gives us a clue to the progress of the arts, and follows them through the dangers of so many contending powers, and the ruin of so many empires.

It is this which makes history delightful; and it becomes still more so to me, by the place which you will possess amongst those who have pleased and instructed mankind. It will raise the emulation of posterity, to hear that your country has bestowed on you the most signal honors, that Verona has raised a statue, with this inscription, *"To the Marquis Scipio Maffei in his lifetime"*—an inscription as beautiful in its kind as that at Montpellier to Louis XIV. *after his death.*

Deign, sir, to accept, with the respects of your fellow-citizens, those of a stranger, who esteems and honors you as much as if he had been born at Verona.

A Letter from M. de la Lindelle to M. de Voltaire.

Sir: You had the politeness to dedicate your tragedy of *"Mérope"* to M. Maffei, and have served the cause of literature both in Italy and France, by pointing out, from the perfect knowledge which you have of the theatre, the different rules and conduct of the Italian and French stages. The partial attachment which you have to everything that comes from Italy, added to your particular regard for M. Maffei, would not permit you to censure the real faults of that excellent writer; but as I have myself nothing in view but truth, and the advancement of the arts, I shall not be afraid to speak the sentiments of the judicious public, and which I am satisfied must be yours also.

The Abbé Desfontaines had already remarked some palpable errors in the *"Mérope"* of M. Maffei; but, according to his usual manner, with more rudeness than justice, he has mingled a few good criticisms with many bad ones. This satirist, so universally decried, had neither knowledge enough of the Italian tongue, nor taste enough to form an equitable judgment.

This, then, is the opinion of the most judicious amongst those literati whom I have consulted, both in France and on the other side of the Alps. *"Mérope"* appears to every one of them, past dis-

pute, the most interesting and truly tragic subject that was ever brought on the stage, infinitely beyond that of *"Athalie"*; because *Athalie* does not want to assassinate the young king, but is deceived by the High-Priest, who seeks revenge on her for her former crimes: whereas in *Mérope* we see a mother, who, in avenging her son, is on the point of murdering that very son himself, her only desire, and her only hope: the interest of *"Mérope"* therefore affects us in a very different manner from that of *"Athalie"*: but it seems as if M. Maffei was satisfied with what the subject naturally suggested to him, without making use of any theatrical art in the conduct of it.

1. The scenes in many places are not linked together, and the stage is left void; a fault which, in the present age, is looked upon as unpardonable, even in the lowest class of dramatic writers.

2. The actors frequently come in and go out without reason; a fault no less considerable.

3. There is no probability, no dignity, no decorum, no art in the dialogue: in the very first scene we see a tyrant reasoning in the calmest manner with *Mérope,* whose husband and children he had murdered, and making love to her: this would have been hissed at Paris, even by the poorest judges.

4. While the tyrant is thus ridiculously making love to the old queen, word is brought that they have found a young man who had committed murder; but it does not appear through the whole course of the play who it was he had killed: he pretends it was a thief, who wanted to steal his clothes. How low, little and poor is this! It would not be borne in a farce at a country fair.

5. The captain of the guard, provost, or whatever you call him, examines the murderer, who has a fine ring upon his finger: this scene is quite low comedy, and the style is agreeable to it, and worthy of the scene.

6. The mother immediately supposes that the robber, who was killed, is her son. It is pardonable, no doubt, in a mother to fear everything; but a queen who is a mother should have required better proofs.

7. In the midst of all these fears, the tyrant *Poliphontes* reasons with *Mérope's* waiting-woman about his pretended passion. These cold and indecent scenes, which are only brought in to fill up the act, would never be suffered on a regular stage. You have only, sir, modestly taken notice of one of these scenes, where *Mérope's* woman desires the tyrant not to hasten the nuptials; because, she says, her mistress has "an attack of a fever": but I, sir, will boldly aver, in the name of all the critics, that such a conversation, and such an answer, are only fit for *Harlequin's* theatre.

8. I will add, moreover, that when the queen, imagining her son to be dead, tells us she longs to pull the heart out of the murderer's breast, and tear it with her teeth, she talks more like a cannibal than an afflicted mother; and that decency should be preserved in everything.

9. *Ægisthus,* who was brought in as a robber, and who had said that he had himself been attacked, is taken for a thief a second time, and carried before the queen, in spite of the king, who notwithstanding undertakes to defend him. The queen binds him to a pillar, is going to kill him with a dart; but before she throws it, asks him some questions.

Ægisthus tells her, that his father is an old man, upon which the queen immediately relents. Is not this an excellent reason for changing her mind, and imagining that *Ægisthus* might be her own son? a most indisputable mark to be sure: is it so very extraordinary that a young man should have an old father? Maffei has added this absurdity, this deficiency of art and genius, to another even more ridiculous, which he had made in his first edition. *Ægisthus* says to the queen, "O *Polydore,* my father." This *Polydore* was the very man to whom *Mérope* had entrusted the care of *Ægisthus.* At hearing the name of *Polydore,* the queen could no longer doubt that *Ægisthus* was her son: thus the piece was entirely at an end. This error was removed; but removed, we see, only to make room for a greater.

10. While the queen is thus ridiculously, and without any reason, in suspense, occasioned by the mention of an old man, the tyrant comes in, and takes *Ægisthus* under his protection. The young man, who should have been represented as a hero, thanks the king for his life, with a base and mean submission that is disgusting, and entirely degrades the character of *Ægisthus.*

11. At length *Mérope* and the tyrant are left together: *Mérope* exhausts her resentment in reproaches without end. Nothing can be more cold and lifeless than these scenes, full of declamation, that have no plot, interest, or contrasted passion in them; they are schoolboy scenes: everything in a play, that is without action, is useless.

12. There is so little art in this piece that the author is always forced to employ confidants to fill up the stage. The fourth act begins with another

cold and useless scene between the tyrant and the queen's waiting-woman, who, a little afterwards, lights, we know not how, on young *Ægisthus,* and persuades him to rest himself in the porch, merely to give the queen a fair opportunity of despatching him when he falls asleep; which he does according to promise. An excellent plot this! and then the queen comes a second time, with an axe in her hand, in order to kill the young man, who is gone to sleep for that purpose. This circumstance, twice repeated, is surely the height of barrenness, as the young man's sleep is the height of ridicule. M. Maffei thinks there is genius and variety in this repetition, because the queen comes in the first time with a dart, and the second with an axe. What a strange effect of fancy!

13. At last old *Polydore* comes in *apropos,* and prevents the queen from striking the blow. One would naturally imagine that this happy instant must produce a thousand affecting incidents between the mother and son; but we meet with nothing of this kind: *Ægisthus* flies off, and sees no more of his mother: he has not so much as one scene with her. This betrays a want of genius that is insupportable. *Mérope* asks the old man what recompense he demands; and the old fool begs her to make him young again. In this manner the queen employs her time, which doubtless she should have spent in running after her son: all this is low, ill-placed, and ridiculous to the last degree.

14. In the course of this piece the tyrant is always for espousing *Mérope;* and, to compass his end, he bids her agents tell her, that he will murder all her servants, if she does not consent to give him her hand. What a ridiculous idea, and how extrava-

gant a tyrant! Could not M. Maffei have found out a more specious pretext to save the honor of a queen, who had meanness enough to marry the murderer of her whole family?

15. Another childish college trick: the tyrant says to his confidant, "I know the art of reigning; I'll put the bold and rebellious to death; give the reins to all kinds of vice; invite my subjects to commit the most atrocious crimes, and pardon the most guilty; expose the good to the fury of the wicked." Did ever man pronounce such vile stuff? This declamation of a regent of sixteen, does it not give us a fine idea of a man who knows how to govern? Racine was condemned for having made *Mathan*—in his *"Athalie"*—say too much against himself; and yet *Mathan* talks reasonably: but here it is to the last degree absurd to pretend, that throwing everything into confusion is the art of ruling well; it is rather the art of dethroning himself. One cannot read anything so ridiculous without laughing at it. M. Maffei is a strange politician.

In a word, sir, this work of Maffei is a fine subject, but a very bad performance. Everybody at Paris agrees that it would not go through one representation; and the sensible men in Italy have a very poor opinion of it. It is in vain the author has taken so much pains in his travels, to engage the worst writers he could pick up to translate his tragedy: it was much easier for him to pay a translator, than to make his piece a good one.

THE ANSWER OF M. DE VOLTAIRE TO M. DE LA LINDELLE.

Sir: The letter which you did me the honor to write to me entitles you to the name of "Hypercritic," which was given to the famous Scaliger; you are truly a most redoubtable adversary; if you treat M. Maffei in this manner, what am I to expect from you? I acknowledge that, in many points, you have too much reason on your side. You have taken a great deal of pains to rake together a heap of brambles and briars; but why would you not enjoy the pleasure of gathering a few flowers? There are certainly many in M. Maffei; and which, I dare affirm, will flourish forever. Such are the scenes between the mother and son, and the narration of the catastrophe. I can't help thinking that these strokes are affecting and pathetic. You say, the subject alone makes all the beauty; but was it not the same subject in other authors who have treated *Mérope?* Why, with the same assistance, had they not the same success? Does not this single argument prove, that M. Maffei owes as much to his genius as to his subject?

To be plain with you, I think M. Maffei has shown more art than myself, in the manner by which he has contrived to make *Mérope* think that her son is the murderer of her son. I could not bring myself to make use of the ring as he did; because, after the royal ring that Boilieu laughs at in his satires, this circumstance would always appear too trifling on our stage. We must conform to the fashions of our own age and nation; and, for the same reason, we ought not lightly to condemn those of foreigners.

Neither M. Maffei nor I have sufficiently explained the motives that should so strongly incline *Poliphontes* to espouse the queen. This is, perhaps, a fault inherent in the subject; but I must own I think this fault very inconsiderable, when the circumstances it produces are so interesting. The grand point is to affect and draw tears from the spectators. Tears were shed both at Verona and at Paris. This is the best answer that can be made to the critics. It is impossible to be perfect; but how meritorious is it to move an audience, in spite of all our imperfections! Most certain it is, that in Italy many things are passed over, which would not be pardoned in France: first, because taste, decorum, and the stage itself, are not the same in both; secondly, because the Italians, having no city where they represent dramatic pieces every day, cannot possibly be so used to things of this kind as ourselves. *Opera,* that splendid monster, has driven *Melpomene* from among them; and there are so many of the *Castrati* there, that no room is left for *Roscius* and *Æsopus:* but if ever the Italians should have a regular theatre, I believe they would soon get beyond us: their stages are more extensive, their language more tractable, their blank verses easier to be made, their nation possessed of more sensibility; but they want encouragement, peace, and plenty.

MÉROPE.

ACT I. SCENE I.

ISMENIA, MÉROPE.

ISMENIA.

Let not, great queen, thy soul forever dwell
On images of horror and despair;
The storm is past, and brighter days succeed:
Long hast thou tasted heaven's severest wrath,
Enjoy its bounties now: the gods, thou seest,
Have blessed our land with victory and peace;
And proud Messene, after fifteen years
Of foul division and intestine wars,
Now from her ruins lifts her towering front,
Superior to misfortune: now no more
Shalt thou behold her angry chiefs support
Their jarring interests, and in guilt alone
United, spread destruction, blood and slaughter,
O'er half thy kingdom, and dispute the throne
Of good Cresphontes: but the ministers
Of heaven, the guardians of our sacred laws,
The rulers, and the people, soon shall meet,
Free in their choice, to fix the power supreme:
If virtue gives the diadem, 'tis thine:
Thine by irrevocable right: to thee,
The widow of Cresphontes, from our kings
Descended, must devolve Messene's throne:
Thou, whom misfortunes and firm constancy
Have made but more illustrious, and more dear;
Thou, to whom every heart in secret tied——

MÉROPE.

No news of Narbas! shall I never see
My child again?

ISMENIA.

Despair not, madam: slaves
Have been despatched on every side; the paths
Of Elis all are open to their search:
Doubtless the object of your fears is placed
In faithful hands, who will restore to you
Their sacred trust.

MÉROPE.

Immortal gods! who see
My bitter griefs, will ye restore my son?
Is my Ægisthus living? have you saved
My wretched infant? O preserve him still,
And shield him from the cruel murderer's hand!
He is your son, the pure, the spotless blood
Of your Alcides. Will you not protect
The dear, dear image of the best of men,
The best of kings, whose ashes I adore?

ISMENIA.

But wherefore must this tender passion turn
Thy soul aside from every other purpose?

MÉROPE.

I am a mother: canst thou wonder yet?

ISMENIA.

A mother's fondness should not thus efface
The duty of a queen, your character,
And noble rank; though in his infant years
You loved this son, yet little have you seen
Or known of him.

MÉROPE.

Not seen him, my Ismenia?
O he is always present to my heart,
Time has no power to loose such bonds as these;
His danger still awakens all my fears,
And doubles my affection: once I've heard
From Narbas, and but once these four years past,
And that alas! but made me more unhappy.
"Ægisthus," then he told me, "well deserves
A better fate; he's worthy of his mother,
And of the gods, his great progenitors;
Exposed to every ill, his virtue braves,
And will surmount them: hope for everything
From him, but be aware of Poliphontes."

ISMENIA.

Prevent him then, and take the reins of empire
In your own hands.

MÉROPE.

That empire is my son's:
Perdition on the cruel step-mother,
The lover of herself, the savage heart,
That could enjoy the pleasures of a throne,
And disinherit her own blood! O no: Ismenia,
If my Ægisthus lives not, what is empire,
Or what is life to me! I should renounce them.
I should have died when my unhappy lord
Was basely slain, by men and gods betrayed.
O perfidy! O guilt! O fatal day!
O death! forever present to my sight!
Methinks even now I hear the dismal shrieks,
I hear them cry, "O save the king, his wife,
His sons;" I see the walls all stained with blood,
The flaming palace, helpless women crushed

Beneath the smoking ruins, fear and tumult
On every side, arms, torches, death, and horror:
Then, rolled in dust, and bathing in his blood,
Cresphontes pressed me to his arms, upraised
His dying eyes, and took his last farewell;
Whilst his two hapless babes, the tender fruits
Of our first love, thrown on the bleeding bosom
Of their dead father, lifted up the hands
Of innocence, and begged me to protect them
Against the barbarous murderers: Ægisthus
Alone escaped: some god defended him.
O thou who didst protect his infancy
Watch o'er and guard him, bring him to my eyes;
O let him from inglorious solitude
Rise to the rank of his great ancestors!
I've borne his absence long, and groaned in chains
These fifteen years: now let Ægisthus reign
Instead of Mérope: for all my pains
And sorrows past, be that the great reward.

SCENE II.

MÉROPE, ISMENIA, EURICLES.

MÉROPE.

Well! what of Narbas, and my son?

EURICLES.

Confused
I stand before thee; all our cares are vain;
We've searched the banks of Peneus, and the fields
Of fair Olympia, even to the walls
Of proud Salmoneus, but no Narbas there
Is to be found or heard of, not a trace
Remaining of him.

MÉROPE.

Narbas is no more,
And all is lost.

ISMENIA.

Whatever thy fears suggest
Thou still believest; and yet who knows but now,
Even whilst we speak, the happy Narbas comes
To crown thy wishes, and restore thy son.

EURICLES.

Perhaps his love, tempered with fair discretion,
Which long concealed Ægisthus from the eyes
Of men, may hide his purposed journey from thee:
He dreads the murderer's hand, and still protects him
From those who slew Cresphontes: we must strive
By artful methods to elude the rage
That cannot be opposed: I have secured
Their passage hither, and have placed some friends
Of most approved valor, whose sharp eyes
Will look abroad, and safe conduct them to thee.

MÉROPE.

I've placed my surest confidence in thee.

EURICLES.

But what alas! can all my watchfulness
And faithful cares avail thee, when the people
Already meet to rob thee of thy right,
And place another on Messene's throne?
Injustice triumphs, and the shameless crowd,
In proud contempt of sacred laws, incline
To Poliphontes.

MÉROPE.

Am I fallen so low:
And shall my son return to be a slave?

To see a subject raised to the high rank
Of his great ancestors, the blood of Jove
Debased, degraded, forced to own a master.
Have I no friend, no kind protector left?
Ungrateful subjects! have you no regard,
No reverence for the memory of Cresphontes?
Have you so soon forgot his glorious deeds,
His goodness to you?

EURICLES.

Still his name is dear,
Still they regret him, still they weep his fate,
And pity thine: but power intimidates,
And makes them dread the wrath of Poliphontes.

MÉROPE.

Thus, by my people still oppressed, I see
Justice give way to faction, interest still,
The arbiter of fate, sells needy virtue
To powerful guilt; the weak must to the strong
Forever yield: but let us hence, and strive
To fire once more their coward hearts to rage
And fierce resentment, for the injured blood
Of Hercules: excite the people's love;
Flatter their hopes; O tell them, Euricles,
Their master is returned.

EURICLES.

I've said too much
Already; Poliphontes is alarmed:
He dreads your son; he dreads your very tears:
Restless ambition, that holds nothing dear
Or sacred but itself, has filled his soul
With bitterness and pride: because he drove
The ruffian slaves from Pylos and Amphrysa,
And saved Messene from a band of robbers,

He claims it as his conquest: for himself
Alone he acts, and would enslave us all:
He looks towards the crown, and to attain it
Would throw down every fence, break every law,
Spill any blood that shall oppose him: they
Who killed thy husband were not more revengeful,
More bloody, than the cruel Poliphontes.

MÉROPE.

I am entangled in some fatal snare
On every side, danger and guilt surround me:
This Poliphontes, this ambitious subject,
Whose crimes——

EURICLES.

He's here: you must dissemble.

SCENE III.

MÉROPE, POLIPHONTES, EROX.

POLIPHONTES.

Madam,
At length I come to lay my heart before you:
I've served the state, and my successful toils
Have opened me a passage to the throne:
The assembled chiefs awhile suspend their choice,
But soon must fix it, or on Mérope,
Or Poliphontes: the unhappy feuds
That laid Messene waste, and filled the land
With blood and slaughter, all are buried now
In peaceful harmony, and we alone
Remain to part the fair inheritance.
We should support each other's mutual claim;
Our common interest, and our common foes,
Love for our country, reason, duty, all

Conspire to join us, all unite to say
The warrior who avenged thy husband, he
Who saved thy kingdom, may aspire to thee.
I know these hoary locks, and wrinkled brow,
Have little charms to please a youthful fair one.
Thou'rt in the bloom of spring, and mayest despise
The winter of my days; but statesmen heed not
Such fond objections: let the royal wreath
Hide these gray hairs, a sceptre and a queen
Will recompense my toils: nor think me rash,
Or vain, you are the daughter of a king,
I know you are, but your Messene wants
A master now; therefore remember, madam,
If you would keep your right, you must—divide it.

MÉROPE.

Heaven, that afflicts me with its bitterest woes,
Prepared me not for this, this cruel insult:
How darest thou ask it? wert thou not the subject
Of great Cresphontes? thinkest thou I will e'er
Betray the memory of my dearest lord,
To share with thee his son's inheritance,
Trust to thy hands his kingdom and his mother?
Thinkest thou the royal wreath was made to bind
A soldier's brows?

POLIPHONTES.

That soldier has a right
To rule the kingdom which his arm defended.
What was the first that bore the name of king,
But a successful soldier? he who serves
His country well requires not ancestry
To make him noble: the inglorious blood,
Which I received from him who gave me life,
I shed already in my country's cause,
It flowed for thee; and, spite of thy proud scorn,

I must at least be equal to the kings
I have subdued: but, to be brief with you,
The throne will soon be mine, and Mérope
May share it with me, if her pride will deign
To accept it: I've a powerful party, madam.

MÉROPE.

A party! wretch, to trample on our laws:
Is there a party which thou darest support
Against the king's, against the royal race?
Is this thy faith, thy solemn vows, thy oath,
Sworn to Cresphontes, and to me; the love,
The honor due to his illustrious shade,
His wretched widow, and his hapless son;
The gods he sprang from, and the throne they gave?

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis doubtful whether yet your son survives;
But grant that, from the mansions of the dead,
He should return, and in the face of heaven
Demand his throne, believe me when I say
He would demand in vain; Messene wants
A master worthy of her, one well proved,
A king who could defend her: he alone
Should wield the sceptre who can best avenge
His country's cause: Ægisthus is a child,
Yet unexperienced in the ways of men,
And therefore little will his birth avail him;
Naught hath he done for us, and naught deserved:
He cannot purchase at so cheap a rate
Messene's throne, the right of power supreme
Defends no more the gift of nature, here
From son to son; it is the price of toil,
Of labor, and of blood; 'tis virtue's meed,
Which I shall claim: have you so soon forgot
The savage sons of Pylos and Amphrysa,

Those lawless plunderers? Think on your Cresphontes,
And your defenceless children whom they slew:
Who saved your country then? Who stopped their fury?
Who put your foes to flight, and chased them hence?
Did not this arm avenge that murdered lord
Whom yet you weep? these, madam, are my rights,
The rights of valor: this is all my rank,
This all my title, and let heaven decide it.
If thy Ægisthus comes, by me perhaps
He may be taught to live, by me to reign:
Then shall he see how Poliphontes guides
The reins of empire. I esteem the blood
Of great Alcides, but I fear it not;
I look beyond Alcides' race, and fain
Would imitate the god from whom he sprung:
I would defend the mother, serve the son;
Be an example to him, and a father.

MÉROPE.

O, sir, no more of your affected cares;
Your generous offers, meant but to insult
My hapless son; if you would wish to tread
In great Alcides' steps, reserve the crown
For his descendant: know, that demi-god
Was the avenger of wronged innocence;
No ravisher, no tyrant; take thou care,
And with his valor imitate his justice;
Protect the guiltless, and defend your king,
Else shalt thou prove a worthless successor.
If thou wouldst gain the mother, seek the son;
Go, bring him to me; bring your master here,
And then perhaps I may descend to you:
But I will never be the vile accomplice,
Or the reward, of guilt like thine.

SCENE IV.

POLIPHONTES, EROX.

EROX.

My lord,
Did you expect to move her? Does the throne
Depend on her capricious will? Must she
Conduct you to it?

POLIPHONTES.

'Twixt that throne and me,
Erox, I see a dreadful precipice
I must o'erleap, or perish: Mérope
Expects Ægisthus; and the fickle crowd,
If he returns, perhaps may bend towards him.
In vain his father's and his brothers' blood,
Have opened wide my passage to the throne;
In vain hath fortune cast her friendly veil
O'er all my crimes; in vain have I oppressed
The blood of kings, whilst the deluded people
Adored me as their friend, if yet there lives
A hateful offspring of Alcides' race:
If this lamented son should e'er again
Behold Messene, fifteen years of toil
At once are lost, and all my hopes o'erthrown;
All the fond prejudice of birth and blood
Will soon revive the memory of Cresphontes,
A hundred kings for his proud ancestors,
The boasted honor of a race divine,
A mother's tears, her sorrows, her despair,
All will conspire to shake my feeble power:
Ægisthus is a foe I must subdue:
I would have crushed the serpent in his shell,

But that the diligent and subtle Narbas
Conveyed him hence, e'er since that time concealed
In some far distant land, he hath escaped
My narrowest search, and baffled all my care:
I stopped his couriers, broke the intelligence
'Twixt him and Mérope; but fortune oft
Deserts us: from the silence of oblivion
Sometimes a secret may spring forth; and heaven,
By slow and solemn steps, may bring down vengeance.

EROX.

Depend, undaunted, on thy prosperous fate;
Prudence, thy guardian god, shall still protect thee:
Thy orders are obeyed; the soldiers watch
Each avenue of Elis and Messene:
If Narbas brings Ægisthus here, they both
Must die.

POLIPHONTES.

But say, canst thou depend on those
Whom thou hast placed to intercept them?

EROX.

Yes:
None of them know whose blood is to be shed,
Or the king's name whom they must sacrifice.
Narbas is painted to them as a traitor,
A guilty vagabond, that seeks some place
Of refuge; and the other, as a slave,
A murderer, to be yielded up to justice.

POLIPHONTES.

It must be so: this crime and I have done;
And yet, when I have rid me of the son,
I must possess the mother: 'twill be useful:
I shall not then be branded with the name

Of a usurper; she will bring with her
A noble portion in the people's love:
I know their hearts are not inclined to me;
With fears dejected, or inflamed with hope,
Still in extremes, the giddy multitude
Tumultuous rove, and interest only binds them,
That makes them mine. Erox, thy fate depends
On my success; thou art my best support:
Go, and unite them; bribe the sordid wretch
With gold to serve me, let the subtle courtier
Expect my favors; raise the coward soul,
Inspire the valiant, and caress the bold;
Persuade and promise, threaten and implore:
Thus far this sword hath brought me on my way;
But what by courage was begun, by art
We must complete; that many-headed monster,
The people, must be soothed by flattery's power:
I'm feared already, but I would be loved.

End of the First Act.

ACT II. SCENE I.

MÉROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

MÉROPE.

Hast thou heard nothing of my dear Ægisthus?
No news from Elis' frontiers? O, too well
I know the cause of this ill-boding silence!

EURICLES.

In all our search we have discovered naught,
Save a young stranger, reeking with the blood
Of one whom he had murdered: we have chained,
And brought him hither.

MÉROPE.

Ha! a murderer,
A stranger too! Whom, thinkest thou, he has slain?
My blood runs cold.

EURICLES.

The mere effect of love
And tenderness: each little circumstance
Alarms a soul like thine, that ever dwells
On one sad object; 'tis the voice of nature,
And will be heard; but let not this disturb thee,
A common accident: our borders long
Have been infested with these ruffian slaves,
The baneful fruit of our intestine broils;
Justice hath lost her power; our husbandmen
Call on the gods for vengeance, and lament
The blood of half their fellow-citizens,
Slain by each other's hand: but, be composed,
These terrors are not thine.

MÉROPE.

Who is this stranger?
Answer me, tell me.

EURICLES.

Some poor nameless wretch,
Such he appears; brought up to infamy,
To guilt, and sorrow.

MÉROPE.

Well, no matter who,
Or what he is; let him be brought before me.
Important truths are often brought to light
By meanest instruments. Perhaps my soul
Is too much moved; pity a woman's weakness,
Pity a mother, who has all to fear,

And nothing to neglect: let him appear;
I'll see, and question him.

EURICLES.

Your orders, madam,
Shall be obeyed.

[*To Ismenia.*

Tell them to bring him here,
Before the queen.

MÉROPE.

I know my cares are vain;
But grief overpowers, and hurries me to act
Perhaps imprudent; but you know I've cause
For my despair; they have dethroned my son,
And would insult the mother: Poliphontes
Hath taken advantage of my helpless state,
And dared to offer me his hand.

EURICLES.

Thy woes
Are greater even than thou thinkest they are.
I know this marriage would debase thy honor,
And yet I see it must be so; thy fate
Hath bound thee to it by the cruel tie
Of dire necessity: I know it wears
A dreadful aspect, yet perchance may prove
The only means of placing on the throne
Its rightful master, so the assembled chiefs
And soldiers think; they with———

MÉROPE.

My son would ne'er
Consent to that; no: poverty and exile,
With all their pains, were far less dreadful to him
Than these base nuptials.

EURICLES.

If to assert his rights
Alone sufficed to seat him on the throne,
Doubtless his pride would spurn the shameful bond:
But if his soul is by misfortune taught
To know itself, if prudence guides his steps,
If his own interest, if his friends' advice,
And above all, necessity, the first
Of human laws, have any influence o'er him,
He would perceive, that his unhappy mother
Could not bestow on him a dearer mark
Of her affection.

MÉROPE.

Ha! what sayest thou?

EURICLES.

Truth,
Unwelcome truth, which nothing but my zeal,
And your misfortunes, should have wrested from me.

MÉROPE.

Wouldst thou persuade me then, that interest e'er
Can get the better of my fixed aversion
For Poliphontes, you who painted him
In blackest colors to me?

EURICLES.

I described him
Even as he is, most dangerous and bold;
I know his rashness, and I know his power;
Naught can resist him, he's without an heir.
Remember that: you say, you love Ægisthus.

MÉROPE.

I do; and 'tis that love which makes the tyrant
Still more detested: wherefore talkest thou thus

Of marriage and of empire? speak to me
Of my dear son; and tell me if he lives;
Inform me, Euricles.

EURICLES.

Behold the stranger
Whom you desired to question; see, he comes.

SCENE II.

MÉROPE, EURICLES, ÆGISTHUS *in chains*, ISMENIA, *Guards.*

ÆGISTHUS.

[*At the bottom of the stage. To Ismenia.*
Is that the great unfortunate, the queen,
Whose glory and whose sorrows reached even me
Amidst the desert wild where I was hid?

ISMENIA.

'Tis she.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou great creator of mankind!
Thou, who didst form those matchless charms, look down
And guard thy image: virtue on a throne
Is sure the first and fairest work of heaven.

MÉROPE.

Is that the murderer? Can such features hide
A cruel heart? Come near, unhappy youth,
Be not alarmed, but answer me; whose blood
Is on thy hands?

ÆGISTHUS.

O, queen, forgive me; fear,

Respect, and grief, bind up my trembling lips.
[*Turning to Euricles.*
I cannot speak; her presence shakes my soul
With terror and amazement.

MÉROPE.

Tell me whom
Thy arm has slain.

ÆGISTHUS.

Some bold presumptuous youth,
Whom fate condemned to fall the wretched victim
Of his own rashness.

MÉROPE.

Ha! a youth! my blood
Runs cold within me: didst thou know him?

ÆGISTHUS.

No:
Messene's walls, her fields, and citizens,
Are new to me.

MÉROPE.

And did this unknown youth
Attack thee then? 'twas in thy own defence?

ÆGISTHUS.

Heaven is my witness, I am innocent.
Just on the borders of Pamisus, where
A temple stands, sacred to Hercules,
Thy great progenitor, I offered up
To the avenger of wronged innocence
My humble prayers for thee; I had no victims,
No precious gifts to lay before him; all
I had to give him, was a spotless heart,
And simple vows, the poor man's hecatomb:
It seemed as if the god received my homage

With kind affection, for I felt my heart
By more than common resolution fired:
Two men, both armed, and both unknown, surprised me;
One in the bloom of youth, the other sunk
Into the vale of years: "What brings thee here?"
They cried, "and wherefore for Alcides' race
Art thou a suppliant?" At this word they raised
The dagger to my breast; but heaven preserved me.
Pierced o'er with wounds, the youngest of them fell
Dead at my feet; the other basely fled,
Like an assassin: knowing not what blood
I might have shed, and doubtful of my fate,
I threw the bloody corpse into the sea,
And fled; your soldiers stopped me; at the name
Of Mérope, I yielded up my arms,
And they have brought me hither.

EURICLES.

Why these tears,
My royal mistress?

MÉROPE.

Shall I own it to thee?
I melted with compassion, as he told
His melancholy tale; I know not why,
But my heart sympathized with his distress:
It cannot be, I blush to think it, yet
Methought I traced the features of Cresphontes:
Cruel remembrance! wherefore am I mocked
With such deceitful images as these,
Such fond delusions?

EURICLES.

Do not then embrace
Such vain suspicions, he's not that barbarian,
That vile impostor, which we thought him.

MÉROPE.

No:
Heaven hath imprinted on his open front
The marks of candor, and of honesty.
Where wert thou born?

ÆGISTHUS.

In Elis.

MÉROPE.

Ha! in Elis!
In Elis! sayst thou? Knowst thou aught of Narbas,
Or of Ægisthus? Never hath that name
Yet reached thine ear? What rank, condition, friends,
Who was thy father?

ÆGISTHUS.

Polycletes, madam,
A poor old man: to Narbas, or Ægisthus,
Of whom thou speakest, I am a stranger.

MÉROPE.

Gods!
Why mock ye thus a poor unhappy mortal?
A little dawn of hope just gleamed upon me,
And now my eyes are plunged in deepest night:
Say, what rank did thy parents hold in Greece?

ÆGISTHUS.

If virtue made nobility, old Sirris
And Polycletes, from whose blood I sprang,
Are not to be despised: their lot indeed
Was humble, but their exemplary virtues
Made even poverty respectable:
Clothed in his rustic garb, my honest father
Obeys the laws, does all the good he can,
And only fears the gods.

MÉROPE.

[*Aside.*

How strangely he affects me! every word
Has some new charm:

[*Turning to Ægisthus.*

But wherefore left you then
The good old man? It must be dreadful to him
To lose a son like thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

A fond desire
Of glory led me hither: I had heard
Of your Messene's troubles, and your own:
Oft had I heard of the illustrious queen,
Whose virtues merited a better fate;
The sad recital moved my soul; ashamed
To spend at Elis my inglorious days,
I longed to brave the terrors of the field
Beneath thy banners: this was my design,
And this alone: an idle thirst of fame
Misled my steps, and in their helpless age
Persuaded me to leave my wretched parents:
'Tis my first fault, and I have suffered for it:
Heaven hath avenged their cause, and I am fallen
Into a fatal snare.

MÉROPE.

'Tis plain he is not,
Cannot be guilty; falsehood never dwells
With such ingenuous, sweet simplicity:
Heaven has conducted here this hapless youth,
And I will stretch the hand of mercy to him:
It is enough for me he is a man,
And most unfortunate; my son perhaps
Even now laments his more distressful fate:
O he recalls Ægisthus to my thoughts:

Their age the same; perhaps Ægisthus now
Wanders like him from clime to clime, unknown,
Unpitied, suffers all the bitter woes
And cruel scorn that waits on penury:
Misery like this will bend the firmest soul,
And wither all its virtues: lot severe
For a king's offspring, and the blood of gods!
O if at least———

SCENE III.

MÉROPE, ÆGISTHUS, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

Hark! madam, heard you not
Their loud tumultuous cries? You know not what—

MÉROPE.

Whence are thy fears?

ISMENIA.

'Tis Poliphontes' triumph:
The wavering people flatter his ambition,
And give their voices for him; he is chosen
Messene's king: 'tis done.

ÆGISTHUS.

I thought the gods
Had on the throne of her great ancestors
Placed Mérope: O heaven! the greater still
Our rank on earth, the more have we to fear:
A poor abandoned exile, like myself,
Is less to be lamented than a queen:
But we have all our sorrows.

[*Ægisthus is led off.*

EURICLES. [*To Mérope.*

I foretold it:
You were to blame to scorn his proffered hand,
And brave his power.

MÉROPE.

I see the precipice
That opens wide its horrid gulf before me;
But men and gods deceived me; I expected
Justice from both, and both refused to grant it.

EURICLES.

I will assemble yet our little force
Of trusty friends, to anchor our poor bark,
And save it from the fury of the storm;
To shield thee from the insults of a tyrant,
And the mad rage of an ungrateful people.

SCENE IV.

MÉROPE, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

'Tis not the people's fault; they love you still,
And would preserve the honor of your crown:
They wish to see you joined to Poliphontes,
That from your hand he then might seem to hold
The sovereign power.

MÉROPE.

They give me to a tyrant,
Betray Ægisthus, and enslave his mother.

ISMENIA.

They call you to the throne of your forefathers:
Obey their voice; it is the voice of heaven.

MÉROPE.

And wouldst thou have me purchase empty honors
With infamy and shame?

SCENE V.

MÉROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

EURICLES.

O queen, I tremble
To stand before thee: now prepare thy heart
For the most dreadful stroke; call forth thy courage
To bear the news.

MÉROPE.

I have no courage left,
'Tis worn out by misfortune; but no matter.
Proceed, inform me.

EURICLES.

All is past; and fate———
I can no more.

MÉROPE.

Go on: my son———

EURICLES.

He's dead:
It is too true: the dreadful news hath shocked
Your friends, and froze their active zeal.

MÉROPE.

My son,
Ægisthus, dead!

ISMENIA.

O gods!

EURICLES.

Some base assassins
Had in his passage laid the snares of death;
The horrid crime is done.

MÉROPE.

O hateful day!
Why shines the sun on such a wretch as I?
He's lost; he's gone: what cruel hand destroyed him!
Who shed his blood, the last of my sad race?

EURICLES.

It was that stranger, that abandoned slave,
Whose persecuted virtue you admired,
For whom such pity rose in your kind breast;
Even he whom you protected.

MÉROPE.

Can it be!
Was he that monster?

EURICLES.

We have certain proofs,
And have discovered two of his companions,
Who, lurking here, were still in search of Narbas,
Who had escaped them: he who slew Ægisthus
Had taken from your son these precious spoils,
[*The armor is shown at a distance at the farther end of the stage.*
The armor which old Narbas bore from hence.
The traitor, that he might not be discovered,
Had thrown aside these bloody witnesses.

MÉROPE.

What hast thou told me? O these trembling hands
Did on Cresphontes put that very armor

When first he went to battle. Ye dear relics,
O to what hands were ye delivered! monster,
To seize this sacred armor.

EURICLES.

'Tis the same
Ægisthus did bring hither.

MÉROPE.

Now behold it
Stained with his blood! but in Alcides' temple
Did they not see a poor old man?

EURICLES.

'Twas Narbas:
So Poliphontes owns.

MÉROPE.

O dreadful truth!
The villain, to conceal his crime, hath cast
His body to the waves, and buried him
In the rude ocean: O I see it all,
All my sad fate: O my unhappy son!

EURICLES.

Would you not have the traitor brought before you,
And questioned here?

SCENE VI.

MÉROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA, EROX, *Guards.*

EROX.

Permit me in the name
Of Poliphontes, my rejected master,

Perhaps rejected but because unknown,
To offer you, in this distressful hour,
His best assistance: he already knows
Ægisthus is no more, and bears a part
In your misfortunes.

MÉROPE.

That I know he does,
A joyful part, and reaps the fruits of them,
The throne of my Cresphontes, and Ægisthus.

EROX.

That throne he wishes but to share with you,
And throw his sceptre at thy feet; the crown
He hopes will make him worthy of thy hand:
But to my hands the murderer must be given,
For sacred is the power of punishment,
'Tis a king's duty; he alone must wield
The sword of justice, the throne's best support,
That to his people and to you he owes;
Midst hymen rites the murderer's blood shall flow,
A great sacrifice.

MÉROPE.

My hand alone
Shall strike the fatal blow: though Poliphontes
Reigns o'er Messene, he must leave to me
The work of vengeance: let him keep my kingdom,
But yield to me the right of punishment:
On that condition, and on that alone,
I will be his: go, and prepare the rites;
This hand, fresh bleeding from the traitor's bosom,
Shall at the altar join with Poliphontes.

EROX.

Doubtless, the king, whose sympathetic heart
Feels for your woes, will readily consent.

SCENE VII.

MÉROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

MÉROPE.

O Euricles, this vile detested marriage,
Whate'er I promised, ne'er will come to pass:
This arm shall pierce the savage murderer's breast,
And instant turn the dagger to my own.

EURICLES.

O! madam, let me by the gods conjure you—

MÉROPE.

They have oppressed me sorely; I have been
Too long the object of their wrath divine:
They have deprived me of my dearest child,
And at their altars shall I ask a husband?
Shall I conduct a stranger to the throne
Of my forefathers? Wouldst thou have me join
The hymeneal to the funeral torch?
Shall Mérope still raise her weeping eyes
To heaven, that shines no more on my Ægisthus?
Shall she wear out her melancholy days
Beneath a hateful tyrant, and expect
In tears and anguish an old age of sorrow?
When all is lost, and not even hope remains,
To live is shameful, and to die, our duty.

End of the Second Act.

ACT III. SCENE I.

NARBAS.

O grief! O horror! O the weight of age!
The youthful hero's warm imprudent ardor

Was not to be restrained; his courage burst
The inglorious chains of vile obscurity,
And he is lost to me, perhaps forever.
How shall I dare to see my royal mistress!
Unhappy Narbas! hither art thou come
Without Ægisthus; Poliphontes reigns,
That subtle, proud artificer of fraud,
That savage murderer, who pursued us still
From clime to clime, and laid the snares of death
On every side, fixed on the sacred throne,
Which by his crimes so oft he hath profaned,
The proud usurper sits, and smiles secure:
Hide me, ye gods, from his all-piercing eye,
And save Ægisthus from the tyrant's sword:
O guide me, heaven, to his unhappy mother,
And let me perish at her feet! Once more
I see the palace, where the best of kings
Was basely slain, and his defenceless child
Saved in these arms; and after fifteen years
Shall I return to fill a mother's heart
With anguish? Who will lead me to the queen?
No friend appears to guide me: but behold,
Near yonder tomb I see a weeping crowd,
And hear their loud laments! Within these walls
Forever dwells some persecuting god.

SCENE II.

NARBAS, ISMENIA.

[*At the farther end of the stage several of the queen's attendants, near the tomb of Cresphontes.*

ISMENIA.

What bold intruder presses thus unknown
To the queen's presence, and disturbs the peace

Of her retirement? comes he from the tyrant,
A spy upon our griefs, to count the tears
Of the afflicted?

NARBAS.

Whosoe'er thou art,
Excuse the boldness of a poor old man;
Forgive the intrusion; I would see the queen,
Perhaps may serve her.

ISMENIA.

What a time is this
Which thou hast chosen to interrupt her griefs!
Respect a mother's bitter sorrows; hence,
Unhappy stranger, nor offend her sight.

NARBAS.

O, in the name of the avenging gods,
Have pity on my age, my misfortunes:
I am no stranger here: O, if you serve
And love the queen, forgive the tears that long
Have flowed for her, and trust a heart that feels
For Mérope as deeply as thy own.
What tomb is that where you so late did join
Your griefs?

ISMENIA.

The tomb of an illustrious hero,
A wretched father, and a hapless king,
The tomb of great Cresphontes.

NARBAS.

[*Going towards the tomb*
My loved master!
Ye honored ashes!

ISMENIA.

But Cresphontes' wife
Is more to be lamented still.

NARBAS.

What worse
Could happen to her?

ISMENIA.

A most dreadful stroke;
Her son is slain.

NARBAS.

Her son! Ægisthus! gods!
And is Ægisthus dead?

ISMENIA.

All know it here
Too well.

NARBAS.

Her son?

ISMENIA.

A barbarous assassin
Did slay him at Messene's gates.

NARBAS.

O death,
I did foretell thee: horror and despair!
Is the queen sure, and art thou not deceived?

ISMENIA.

O 'tis too plain; we have undoubted proofs;
It must be so: he is no more.

NARBAS.

Is this
The fruit of all my care?

ISMENIA.

The wretched queen,
Abandoned to despair, will scarce survive him:

She lived but for her child, and now the ties
Are loosed that bound her to this hated life:
But, ere she dies, with her own hand she waits
To pierce the murderer's heart, and be revenged;
Ev'n at Cresphontes' tomb his blood shall flow.
Soon will the victim, by the king's permission,
Be hither brought, to perish at her feet:
But Mérope is lost in grief, and therefore
Would wish to be alone: you must retire.

NARBAS.

If it be so, why should I seek the queen?
I will but visit yonder tomb, and die.

SCENE III.

ISMENIA.

[*Alone.*

This old man seems most worthy: how he wept!
Whilst the unfeeling slaves around us seem,
Like their proud master, but to mock our sorrows:
What interest could he have? yet tranquil pity
Doth seldom shed so many tears; methought
He mourned the lost Ægisthus like a father:
He must be sought—but here's a dreadful sight.

SCENE IV.

MÉROPE, ISMENIA, EURICLES, ÆGISTHUS *in chains, Guards, Sacrificers.*

MÉROPE.

[*Near the tomb.*

Bring forth that horrid victim to my sight;
I must invent some new unheard of torment,

That may be equal to his crime; alas!
Not to my grief, that were impossible.

ÆGISTHUS.

Dear have I bought thy momentary kindness,
Guardians of innocence, protect me now!

EURICLES.

Before the traitor suffers, let him name
His vile accomplices.

MÉROPE.

[*Coming forward.*

He must; he shall:
Say, monster, what induced thee to a crime
So horrible to nature! How had I
E'er injured thee?

ÆGISTHUS.

Now bear me witness, gods,
You who avenge the perjuries of men,
If e'er my lips knew fraud or base imposture;
I told thee naught but simple truth: thy heart,
Fierce as it was, relented at my tale,
And you stretched forth a kind, protecting hand;
So soon is justice weary of her talk?
Unwitting I have shed some precious blood:
Whose was it, tell me, what new interest sways thee?

MÉROPE.

What interest? barbarian!

ÆGISTHUS.

O'er her cheek
A deadly paleness spreads: it wounds my soul
To see her thus. O I would spill my blood
A thousand times to save her.

MÉROPE.

Subtle villain!
How artfully dissembled is that grief!
He kills me, and yet seems to weep my fate.
[*She falls back into the arms of Ismenia.*

EURICLES.

Madam, avenge yourself, avenge the laws,
The cause of nature, and the blood of kings.

ÆGISTHUS.

Is this the royal justice of a court?
Ye praise and flatter first, and then condemn me.
Why did I leave my peaceful solitude!
O good old man, what will thy sorrows be,
And thou, unhappy mother, whose dear voice
So oft foretold——

MÉROPE.

Barbarian, and hast thou
A mother? I had been a mother yet
But for thy rage, thou hast destroyed my son.

ÆGISTHUS.

If I am thus unhappy, if he was
Indeed thy son, I ought to suffer for it;
But though my hand was guilty, yet my heart
Was innocent: heaven knows I would have given
This day my life to save or his or thine.

MÉROPE.

Didst thou take this armor from him?

ÆGISTHUS.

No:
It is my own.

MÉROPE.

What sayest thou?

ÆGISTHUS.

Yes; I swear
By thee, by him, by all thy ancestors,
My father gave to me that precious gift.

MÉROPE.

Thy father! where? in Elis: how he moves me!
What was his name? speak, answer.

ÆGISTHUS.

Polycletes:
I've told thee so already.

MÉROPE.

O thou rivest
My heart: what foolish pity stopped my vengeance?
It is too much: assist me, friends, bring here
The monster, the perfidious——

[*Lifting up the dagger.*

O ye manes
Of my dear son, this bloody arm——

NARBAS.

[*Entering on a sudden.*

O gods!
What wouldst thou do?

MÉROPE.

Who calls?

NARBAS.

Stop: stop—alas!
If I but name his mother, he's undone.

MÉROPE.

Die, traitor.

NARBAS.

Stop.

ÆGISTHUS.

[*Turning towards Narbas.*

My father!

MÉROPE.

Ha! his father!

ÆGISTHUS.

[*To Narbas.*

What do I see? and whither wert thou going?
Camest thou to be a witness of my death?

NARBAS.

O, madam, go no further: Euricles,
Remove the victim, let me speak to thee.

EURICLES.

[*Takes away Ægisthus, and shuts up the lower part of the scene.*

O heaven!

MÉROPE.

[*Coming forward.*

Thou makest me tremble; I was going
To avenge my son.

NARBAS.

[*Kneeling down.*

To sacrifice—Ægisthus.

MÉROPE.

Ægisthus! ha!

NARBAS.

'Twas he, whom thy rash arm
Had well nigh slain; believe me, 'twas Ægisthus.

MÉROPE.

And lives he then?

NARBAS.

'Tis he, it is your son.

MÉROPE.

[*Fainting in the arms of Ismenia.*

I die!

ISMENIA.

Good heaven!

NARBAS.

[*To Ismenia.*

Recall her fleeting spirit;
This sudden transport of tumultuous joy,
Mixed with anxiety and tender fears,
May quite o'erpower her.

MÉROPE.

[*Coming to herself.*

Narbas, is it you?
Or do I dream? is it my son? where is he?
Let him come hither.

NARBAS.

No: refrain your love,
Restrain your tenderness.

[*To Ismenia.*

O keep the secret;
The safety of the queen, and of Ægisthus,
Depend on that.

MÉROPE.

Alas! and must fresh danger
Embitter my new joys? O dear Ægisthus,
What cruel god still keeps thee from thy mother?
Was he restored but to afflict me more?

NARBAS.

You knew him not, and would have slain your son:
If his arrival here be once discovered,
And you acknowledge him, he's lost forever.
Dissemble, therefore, for thou knowest that guilt
Reigns in Messene: thou art watched; be cautious.

SCENE V.

MÉROPE, EURICLES, NARBAS, ISMENIA.

EURICLES.

'Tis the king's order, madam, that we seize——

MÉROPE.

Whom?.

EURICLES.

The young stranger, whom thou had'st condemned
To death.

MÉROPE.

[*With transport.*

That stranger is my child, my son:
They would destroy him, Narbas, let us fly——

NARBAS.

No: stay.

MÉROPE.

It is my son; they'll have him from me,
My dear Ægisthus: why is this?

EURICLES.

The king
Would question him before he dies.

MÉROPE.

Indeed!
And knows he then I am his mother?

EURICLES.

No:
'Tis yet a secret to them all.

MÉROPE.

We'll fly
To Poliphontes, and implore his aid.

NARBAS.

Fear Poliphontes, and implore the gods.

EURICLES.

Howe'er Ægisthus may alarm the tyrant,
Thy promised nuptials make his pardon sure:
Bound to each other in eternal bonds,
Thy son will soon be his; though jealousy
May now subsist, it must be lost in love
When he's your husband.

NARBAS.

He your husband, gods!
I'm thunderstruck.

MÉROPE.

I will no longer bear
Such anguish, let me hence.

NARBAS.

Thou shalt not go:
Unhappy mother! thou shalt ne'er submit
To these detested nuptials.

EURICLES.

She is forced
To wed him, that she may avenge Cresphontes.

NARBAS.

He was his murderer.

MÉROPE.

He! that traitor!

NARBAS.

Yes:

By Poliphontes thy Ægisthus fell,
His father, and his brothers: I beheld
The tyrant weltering in Cresphontes' blood.

MÉROPE.

O gods!

NARBAS.

I saw him glorying in his crimes;
Saw him admit the foe, and through the palace
Spread fire and slaughter; yet appeared to those
Who knew him not, the avenger of that king
Whom he had slain: I pierced the savage crowd,
And in my feeble arms upraised your son,
And bore him thence; the pitying gods protected
His helpless innocence: these fifteen years,
From place to place I led him, changed my name
To Polycletes, hid him from the foe,
And now at last it seems have brought him hither,
To see a tyrant on Messene's throne,
And Mérope the wife of Poliphontes.

MÉROPE.

Thy tale has harrowed up my soul.

EURICLES.

He comes:

'Tis Poliphontes.

MÉROPE.

Is it possible?
Away, good Narbas, hide thee from his rage.

NARBAS.

Now, if Ægisthus e'er was dear to thee,
Dissemble with the tyrant.

EURICLES.

We must hide
This secret in the bottom of our hearts,
A word may ruin all.

MÉROPE. [*To Euricles.*

Go thou and guard
That precious treasure well.

EURICLES.

O doubt it not.

MÉROPE.

My hopes depend on thee: he is my son
Remember, and thy king.—The monster comes.

SCENE VI.

MÉROPE, POLIPHONTES, EROX, ISMENIA, *Attendants.*

POLIPHONTES.

The altar is prepared, the throne awaits you,
Our interests soon will with our hearts be joined:
As king, and husband, 'tis my duty now
Both to defend and to avenge you, madam:
Two of the traitors I have seized already,
Who shall repay the murder with their blood:

But, spite of all my care, the tardy vengeance
Hath seconded but ill my purposes:
You told me you would wish yourself to slay
The murderer, and I gave him to your justice.

MÉROPE.

O that I might be my own great avenger!

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis a king's duty, and shall be my care.

MÉROPE.

Thine, saidst thou?

POLIPHONTES.

Wherefore is the sacrifice
Delayed? dost thou no longer love thy son?

MÉROPE.

May all his foes meet with their due reward!
But if this murderer has accomplices,
By him perhaps I may hereafter learn
Who killed my dear Cresphontes: they who slew
The father would forever persecute
The mother and the son: O if I e'er——

POLIPHONTES.

I too could wish to be informed of that,
And therefore I have taken him to my care.

MÉROPE.

To thine?

POLIPHONTES.

Yes, madam, and I hope to draw
The secret from him.

MÉROPE.

But you must not keep
This murderer: I must have him; nay, you promised,
You know you did——

[*Aside.*

O cruel fate! my son!
What art thou doomed to?

[*To Poliphontes.*

Pity me, my lord!

POLIPHONTES.

Whence is this sudden transport? he shall die.

MÉROPE.

Who? he?

POLIPHONTES.

His death shall satisfy thy soul.

MÉROPE.

Ay: but I want to see, to speak to him.

POLIPHONTES.

These starts of passion, and these sudden transports
Of rage and tenderness, that face of horror,
Might give me cause perhaps of just suspicion;
And, to be plain with you, some strange disgust,
Some groundless fears, some new alarm, hath raised
This tempest in your soul; what have you heard
From that old man who went so lately hence?
Why doth he shun me? what am I to think?
Who is he?

MÉROPE.

O my lord! so lately crowned
Do fears and jealousies already wait
Around your throne?

POLIPHONTES.

Why wilt not thou partake it?
Then should I bid adieu to all my fears:
The altar waits, prepared for Mérope
And Poliphontes.

MÉROPE.

Thou hast gained the throne,
The gods have given it thee, and now thou wantest
Cresphontes' wife to make his kingdom sure.
This crime alone——

ISMENIA.

O stop——

MÉROPE.

My lord, forgive me;
I am a wretched mother; I have lost
My all; the gods, the cruel gods have robbed me
Of every bliss: O give me, give me back
The murderer of my son!

POLIPHONTES.

This hand shall shed
The traitor's blood: come, madam, follow me.

MÉROPE.

O gracious heaven! in pity to my woes,
Preserve a mother, and conceal her weakness!

End of the Third Act.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

POLIPHONTES, EROX.

POLIPHONTES.

I almost thought she had discovered something
Touching her husband's murder, for she frowned

Indignant on me; but I want her hand,
And not her heart; the crowd will have it so;
We must not disoblige them; by this marriage
I shall secure them both: I look on her
But as a slave that's useful to my purpose,
Chained to my chariot wheels to grace my triumph,
And little heed her hatred or her love.
But thou hast talked to this young murderer,
What thinkest thou of him?

EROX.

He's immovable,
Simple in speech, but of undaunted courage,
He braves his fate: I little thought to find
In one of his low birth a soul so great;
I own, my lord, I cannot but admire him.

POLIPHONTES.

Who is he?

EROX.

That I know not; but most certain
He is not one of those whom we employed
To watch for Narbas.

POLIPHONTES.

Art thou sure of that?
The leader of that band I have myself
Despatched, and prudent buried in his blood
The dangerous secret; but this young unknown
Alarms me: is it certain he destroyed
Ægisthus? has propitious fate, that still
Prevented all my wishes, been thus kind?

EROX.

Mérope's tears, her sorrow, and despair,
Are the best proofs; but all I see confirms

Thy happiness, and fortune hath done more
Than all our cares.

POLIPHONTES.

Fortune doth often reach
What wisdom cannot: but I know too well
My danger, and the number of my foes,
To leave that fortune to decide my fate:
Whoe'er this stranger be, he must not live,
His death shall purchase me this haughty queen,
And make the crown sit firmer on my head.
The people then, subjected to my power,
Will think at last their prince is dead, and know
That I avenged him: but, inform me, who
Is this old man that shuns me thus? there seems
Some mystery in his conduct; Mérope,
Thou tellest me, would have slain the murderer,
But that this old man did prevent her; what
Could move him to it?

EROX.

He's the young man's father,
And came to implore his pardon.

POLIPHONTES.

Ha! his pardon!
I'll see, and talk with him; but he avoids me,
And therefore I suspect him; but I'll know
This secret: what could be the queen's strange purpose,
In thus deferring what so ardently
She seemed to wish for? all her rage was changed
To tenderest pity; through her griefs methought
A ray of joy broke forth.

EROX.

What is her joy,
Her pity, or her vengeance, now to thee?

POLIPHONTES.

It doth concern me nearly; I have cause
For many fears; but she approaches:—bring
That stranger to me.

SCENE II.

POLIPHONTES, EROX, ÆGISTHUS, EURICLES, MÉROPE, ISMENIA, *Guards.*

MÉROPE.

Fulfil your word, sir, and avenge me; give
The victim to my hands, and mine alone.

POLIPHONTES.

You see I mean to keep it: he's before you:
Revenge yourself, and shed the traitor's blood;
Then, madam, with your leave, we'll to the altar.

MÉROPE.

O gods!

ÆGISTHUS.

[*To Poliphontes.*

Am I then to be made the purchase
Of the queen's favor? my poor life indeed
Is but of little moment, and I die
Contented; but I am a stranger here,
A helpless, innocent, unhappy stranger;
If heaven has made thee king, thou shouldst protect me:

I've slain a man, 'twas in my own defence;
The queen demands my life; she is a mother,
Therefore I pity her, and bless the hand
Raised to destroy me: I accuse none here
But thee, thou tyrant.

POLIPHONTES.

Hence, abandoned villain;
Darest thou insult—

MÉROPE.

O pardon his rash youth,
Brought up in solitude, and far removed
From courts, he knows not the respect that's due
To majesty.

POLIPHONTES.

Amazing! justified
By you!

MÉROPE.

By me, my lord?

POLIPHONTES.

Yes, madam, you.
Is this the murderer of your son?

MÉROPE.

My child,
My son, the last of a long line of kings,
Beneath a vile assassin's hand——

ISMENIA.

O heaven!
What wouldst thou do?

POLIPHONTES.

Thine eyes are fixed upon him
With tenderness and joy; thy tears too flow,
Though thou wouldst hide them from me.

MÉROPE.

No: 'tis false:
I would not, cannot hide them: well thou knowest
I've too much cause to weep.

POLIPHONTES.

Dry up your tears;
He dies this moment: soldiers, do your office.

MÉROPE.

[*Coming forward.*

O spare him, spare him.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ha! she pities me.

POLIPHONTES.

Despatch him.

MÉROPE.

O he is——

POLIPHONTES.

Strike.

MÉROPE.

Stay, barbarian,
He is—my son.

ÆGISTHUS.

Am I thy son?

MÉROPE.

[*Embracing him.*

Thou art:
And heaven, that snatched thee from this wretched bosom,
Which now too late hath opened my longing eyes,
Restores thee to a weeping mother's arms
But to destroy us both.

ÆGISTHUS.

What miracle
Is this, ye gods?

POLIPHONTES.

A vile imposture: thou
His mother? thou, who didst demand his death?

ÆGISTHUS.

O if I die the son of Mérope
I die contented, and absolve my fate.

MÉROPE.

I am thy mother, and my love of thee
Betrayed us both; we are undone, Ægisthus;
Yes, Poliphontes, the important secret
At length is thine; before thee stands my son,
Cresphontes' heir; thy master, and thy king;
The offspring of the gods, thy captive now;
I have deceived thee, and I glory in it;
'Twas for my child: but nature has no power
O'er tyrants' hearts, that still rejoice in blood:
I tell thee, 'tis my son, 'tis my Ægisthus.

POLIPHONTES.

Ha! can it be?

ÆGISTHUS.

It is; it must be so;
Her tears confirm it: yes, I am the son
Of Mérope, my heart assures me of it:
And, hadst thou not disarmed me, with this hand
I would chastise thee, traitor.

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis too much;
I'll bear no more: away with him.

MÉROPE.

[*Falling on her knees.*
Behold
Thus low on earth the wretched Mérope
Falls at your feet, and bathes them with her tears:
Doth not this humble posture speak my griefs,
And say I am a mother? O I tremble
When I look back on the dire precipice
I have escaped, the murder of my son;
Still I lament the involuntary crime.
Didst thou not say thou wouldst protect his youth,
And be a father to him? and yet now
Thou wouldst destroy him: O have pity on him:
Some guilty hand bereaved him of a father;
O save the son, defend the royal race,
The seed of gods: defenceless and alone
He stands before thee: trample not on him,
Who is unable to resist thy power;
Let him but live, and I am satisfied;
Save but my child, and all shall be forgotten:
O he would make me happy even in woe;
My husband and my children all would live
Once more in my Ægisthus: O behold,
His royal ancestors with me implore thee
To spare the noble youth, and save thy king.

ÆGISTHUS.

Rise, madam, rise, or I shall never believe
Cresphontes was my father; 'tis beneath
His queen, beneath the mother of Ægisthus,
To supplicate a tyrant; my fierce heart
Will never stoop so low: undaunted long
I braved the meanness of my former fortune,
Nor am I dazzled by the splendid lustre
Of these new honors; but I feel myself
Of royal blood, and know I am thy son.
Great Hercules, like me, began his days
In misery and sorrow; but the gods
Conducted him to immortality,
Because, like me, he rose superior to them:
To me his blood descends; O let me add
His courage, and his virtues; let me die
Worthy of thee; be that my heritage!
Cease then thy prayers, nor thus disgrace the blood
Of those immortal powers from whom I sprang.

POLIPHONTES. [*To Mérope.*

Trust me, I bear a part in your misfortunes,
Feel for your griefs, and pity your distress;
I love his courage, and esteem his virtue;
He seems well worthy of the royal birth
Which he assumes; but truths of such importance
Demand more ample proofs; I take him therefore
Beneath my care, and, if he is thy son,
I shall adopt him mine.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou, thou adopt me?

MÉROPE.

Alas! my child!

POLIPHONTES.

His fate depends on thee:
It is not long since, to secure his death,
Thou didst consent to marry Poliphontes;
Now thou wouldst save him, shall not love do more
Than vengeance?

MÉROPE.

Ha! barbarian!

POLIPHONTES.

Madam, know
His life, or death, depends on thy resolve:
I know your love, your tenderness, too well,
To think you will expose to my just wrath
So dear an object by a harsh refusal.

MÉROPE.

My lord, at least let me be free, and deign—

POLIPHONTES.

He is your son, or he's a traitor, madam;
I must be yours before I can protect him,
Or be revenged on both; a word from you
Decides his fate, or punishment, or pardon;
Or as his mother I shall look upon you
As his accomplice; therefore make your choice:
I will receive your answer at the temple
Before the attesting gods.

[*To the soldiers.*

Guard well your prisoner:
Come, follow me:

[*Turning to Mérope.*

I shall expect you, madam;
Be quick in your resolve; confirm his birth
By giving me your hand; your answer only

Saves or condemns him; and as you determine
He is my victim, madam, or—my son.

MÉROPE.

O grant me but the pleasure to behold him;
Restore him to my love, to my despair.

POLIPHONTES.

You'll see him at the temple.

ÆGISTHUS.

[*As the guards are carrying him off.*
O great queen,
I dare not call thee by the sacred name
Of mother, do not, I beseech thee, aught
Unworthy of thyself, or of Ægisthus;
For, if I am thy son, thy son shall die
As a king ought.

SCENE III.

MÉROPE. [*Alone.*

Ye cruel spoilers, why
Will you thus tear him from me? O he's gone,
I've lost him now forever; wherefore, heaven,
Didst thou restore him to a mother's vows,
Or why preserve him in a foreign land,
To fall at last a wretched sacrifice,
A victim to the murderer of his father?
O save him, hide him in the desert's gloom;
Direct his steps, and shield him from the tyrant!

SCENE IV.

MÉROPE, NARBAS, EURICLES.

MÉROPE.

O Narbas, knowest thou the unhappy fate
To which I am doomed?

NARBAS.

Well I know the king
Must die; I know Ægisthus is in chains.

MÉROPE.

And I destroyed him.

NARBAS.

You?

MÉROPE.

Discovered all:
But thinkest thou, Narbas, ever mother yet
Could see a child, as I did, and be silent?
But it is past: and now I must repair
My weakness with my crimes.

NARBAS.

What crimes?

SCENE V.

MÉROPE, NARBAS, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

O madam,
Now call forth all the vigor of your soul,
The hour of trial comes: the fickle crowd,

Still fond of novelty, with ardent zeal,
Press forward to behold the expected nuptials;
Each circumstance conspires to serve the tyrant:
Already the bribed priest has made his god
Declare for Poliphontes: "He received
Your vows, Messene was a witness to them,
And heaven will see the contract is fulfilled:"
Thus spoke the holy seer; the people answered
With acclamations loud, and songs of joy;
They little know the grief that wrings thy heart;
But thank the gods for these detested nuptials,
And bless the tyrant for his cruelty.

MÉROPE.

And are my sorrows made the public joy?

NARBAS.

O these are dreadful means to save thy son.

MÉROPE.

They are indeed: thou shudderest at the thought:
It is a crime.

NARBAS.

But to destroy thy child
Were still more horrible.

MÉROPE.

Away: despair
Has given me courage, and restored my virtue:
Let's to the temple; there I'll show the people
My dear Ægisthus; 'twixt myself and the altar
Will place my son; the gods will see him there;
They will defend him, for from them he sprang:
Too long already persecuting heaven
Hath scourged his helpless innocence; and now
It will avenge him: O I will set forth

His savage murderer in the blackest colors,
Till vengeance shall inspire each honest heart
With tenfold rage: now dread a mother's cries,
Ye cruel tyrants, for they will be heard:
They come; alas! I tremble yet, despair
And horror seize me: hark, they call, my son
Is dying: see the cruel murderer plants
A dagger in his breast: a moment more
And he is lost: ye savage ministers
[*Turning to the sacrificers.*
Of the base tyrant, you must drag the victim
Up to the altar; can you, must you do it?
O vengeance, duty, tenderness, and love,
And thou great nature, what will ye ordain,
What will ye do with an unhappy queen,
Abandoned to despair?

END of the FOURTH ACT.

ACT V. SCENE I.

ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES.

NARBAS.

Our fate is yet uncertain, whilst the tyrant
Still keeps us in the palace; all my fears
Are for Ægisthus: O my king, my son,
Let me still call thee by that tender name,
O live, disarm the tyrant's rage, preserve
A life so dear, so precious to Messene,
So valued by thy faithful Narbas!

EURICLES.

Think
On the poor queen, who, for thy sake alone
A humble suppliant, sprinkles with her tears
The tyrant's murderous hand.

ÆGISTHUS.

I'm scarce awakened
From my long dream, I seem as one new-born;
A wandering stranger in a world unknown;
New thoughts inspire, new day breaks in upon me;
The son of Mérope, and great Cresphontes;
And yet his murderer triumphs; he commands,
And I obey; the blood of Hercules
A captive and in chains!

NARBAS.

O would to heaven
The grandson of Alcides still remained
Unknown in Elis!

ÆGISTHUS.

Is it not most strange,
Young as I am, that I should know already,
By sad experience, every human woe?
Horror and shame, and banishment, and death,
Since my first dawn of life, have pressed upon me:
A persecuted wretch I wandered long
From clime to clime, hid in the desert's gloom,
I languished there in vile obscurity:
Yet, bear me witness, heaven, midst all my woes
Nor murmured nor complained: though proud ambition
Devoured my soul, I learned the humble virtues
That suited best my hard and low condition:
Still I respected, still obeyed thee, Narbas,
And loved thee as a father; nor would e'er
Have wished to find another, but high heaven
Would change my fate to make me but more wretched:
I am Cresphontes' son, yet can't avenge him;
I've found a mother, and a tyrant now

Will snatch her from me; soon she must be his:
O I could curse the hour that gave me birth,
And the kind succor which thy goodness lent me:
O why didst thou hold back the uplifted hand
Of a mistaken mother? But for thee
I had fulfilled my fate, and all my woes
Had ended with my life.

NARBAS.

We are undone,
The tyrant comes.

SCENE II.

POLIPHONTES, ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES, *Guards.*

POLIPHONTES.

[*To Narbas and the rest.*

Retire: and thou, rash youth,
Whose tender years demand my pity, list,
And mark me well; for the last time I come
To give thee here thy choice of life or death,
Thy present and thy future happiness,
Thy very being hangs upon my will:
I can advance thee to the highest rank,
Or shut thee in a dungeon, kill or save thee:
Removed from courts, and bred in solitude,
Thou art not fit to govern; let me guide
In wisdom's ways thy inexperienced youth;
Assume not in thy humble state a pride
Which thou mistakest for virtue: if thy birth
Be mean and lowly, bend to thy condition;
If happier fate hath given thee to descend

From royal blood, and thou wert born a prince,
Make thyself worthy of thy noble rank,
And learn of me to rule: the queen, thou seest,
Has set thee an example; she obeys,
And meets me at the temple; follow her,
Tread in my steps, attend us to the altar,
And swear eternal homage to thy king,
To Poliphontes: if thou fearest the gods,
Call them to witness thy obedience; haste,
The gates of glory open to receive,
And not to enter may be fatal to thee:
Determine therefore now, and answer me.

ÆGISTHUS.

How can I answer when thou hast disarmed me?
Thy words, I own, astonish and confound;
But give me back that weapon which thy fears
Have wrested from me; give me my good sword,
And I will answer as I ought; will show thee,
Perfidious as thou art, which is the slave,
And which the master, whether Poliphontes
Was born to rule o'er princes, or Ægisthus
To scourge oppressors.

POLIPHONTES.

Impotence and rashness!
My kind indulgence makes thee insolent:
Thou thinkest I'll not demean myself so far
To punish an unknown rebellious slave;
But mercy, thus abused, will change to wrath:
I give thee but a moment to determine,
And shall expect thee at the altar; there
To die or to obey: guards, bring him to me:
Narbas, to you and Euricles I leave
The haughty rebel; you shall answer for him:
I know your hatred of me, and I know

Your weakness, too, but trust to your experience,
You will advise him for the best; meantime
Remember, whether he's the son of Narbas
Or Mérope, he must obey, or die.

SCENE III.

ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES.

ÆGISTHUS.

I'll listen to no counsel but the voice
Of vengeance; O inspire me, Hercules,
O from thy seat of endless bliss look down
On thy Ægisthus, animate his soul,
And guide his footsteps! Poliphontes calls,
I will attend him; let us to the altar.

NARBAS.

Wilt thou then die?

EURICLES.

We must not follow thee:
Let us collect our few remaining friends,
And strive——

ÆGISTHUS.

Away: another time my soul
Would listen to your kind advice, for well
I know ye love me; but no counsellors
Must now be heard save all-directing heaven
And my own heart: the irresolute alone
Is swayed by others, but the blood of heroes
Will guide itself: away, the die is cast.
What do I see? O gracious heaven! my mother!

SCENE IV.

MÉROPE, ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES, *Attendants.*

MÉROPE.

Once more, Ægisthus, by the tyrant's order,
We meet together; he has sent me to thee:
Think not that, after these detested nuptials,
I mean to live; but for thy sake, my son,
I have submitted to this shameful bondage:
For thee alone I fear; for thee I bear
This load of infamy: O live, Ægisthus,
Let me entreat thee, live; ere thou canst rule
Thou must obey, and servitude must open
The path to vengeance; thou contemnest my weakness,
I know thou dost; but O the more I love
The more I fear. O my dear child—

ÆGISTHUS.

Be bold,
And follow me.

MÉROPE.

Alas! what wouldst thou do?
Why, ye just gods, why was he made too virtuous?

ÆGISTHUS.

Seest thou my father's tomb? dost thou not hear
His voice? art thou a mother and a queen?
O if thou art, come on.

MÉROPE.

Methinks some god
Inspires thy soul, and raises thee above

The race of mortals: now I see the blood
Of great Alcides flows through every vein,
And animates Ægisthus: O my son,
Give me a portion of thy noble fire,
And raise this drooping heart!

ÆGISTHUS.

Hast thou no friends
Within this fatal temple?

MÉROPE.

Once I had
A crowd of followers when I was a queen,
But now their virtue sinks beneath the weight
Of my misfortunes, and they bend their necks
To this new yoke: they hate the tyrant, yet
Have crowned him; love their queen, and yet desert her.

ÆGISTHUS.

By all art thou abandoned; at the altar
Waits Poliphontes for thee?

MÉROPE.

Yes.

ÆGISTHUS.

His soldiers,
Do they attend him?

MÉROPE.

No: he is surrounded
By that ungrateful faithless crowd that once
Encircled Mérope, by them upled
To the altar, I will force for thee alone
A passage.

ÆGISTHUS.

And alone I'll follow thee:
There shall I meet my ancestors divine:
The gods who punish murderers will be there.

MÉROPE.

Alas! these fifteen years they have contemned thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

They did it but to try me.

MÉROPE.

What's thy purpose?

ÆGISTHUS.

No matter what; let us begone: farewell
My mournful friends, at least ye soon shall know
The son of Mérope deserved your care.
[*To Narbas, embracing him.*
Narbas, believe me, thou shalt never blush
To own me for thy son.

SCENE V.

NARBAS.

What means Ægisthus?
Alas! my cares are fruitless all and vain:
I hoped the sure slow-moving hand of time
Would justify the ways of heaven, and place
The wronged Ægisthus on Messene's throne;
But guilt still triumphs, and my hopes are vanished;
His courage will destroy him; death awaits
His disobedience.
[*A noise within.*

EURICLES.

Hark! they shout.

NARBAS.

Alas!
It is the fatal signal.

EURICLES.

Let us listen.

NARBAS.

I tremble.

EURICLES.

Doubtless, at the very moment
When Poliphontes was to wed the queen,
She has dissolved the shameful bonds by death,
For so her rage had purposed.

NARBAS.

Then Ægisthus
Must perish too, she should have lived for him.

EURICLES.

The noise increases, like the rolling thunder
Onward it comes, and every moment grows
More dreadful.

NARBAS.

Hark! I hear on every side
The trumpets sound, the groans of dying men,
And clash of swords; they force the palace.

EURICLES.

See
Yon bloody squadron; look, it is dispersed;
They fly.

NARBAS.

Perhaps to serve the tyrant's cause.

EURICLES.

Far as my eyes can reach I see them still
Engaged in fight.

NARBAS.

Whose blood will there be shed?
Surely I heard the name of Mérope,
And of Ægisthus.

EURICLES.

Thanks to heaven, the ways
Are open, I will hence, and know my fate.
[*He goes out.*

NARBAS.

I'll follow thee, but not with equal steps,
For I am old and feeble: O ye gods!
Restore my strength, give to this nerveless arm
Its former vigor; let me save my king,
Or yield up the poor remnant of my days,
And die in his defence.

SCENE VI.

NARBAS, ISMENIA.

[*A crowd of people.*

NARBAS.

Who's there? Ismenia?
Bloody and pale! O horrid spectacle!
Art thou indeed Ismenia?

ISMENIA.

O my voice,
My breath is lost; let me recover them,
And I will tell thee all.

NARBAS.

My son—
The queen—do they yet live?

ISMENIA.

I'm scarce myself;
Half dead with fear; the crowd has borne me hither.

NARBAS.

How does Ægisthus?

ISMENIA.

O he is indeed
The son of gods; a stroke so terrible,
So noble! never did the unconquered courage
Of great Alcides with a deed so bold
Astonish mortals.

NARBAS.

O my son, my king,
The work of my own hands, the gallant hero!

ISMENIA.

Crowned with fresh flowers the victim was prepared,
And Hymen's torches round the altar blazed,
When Poliphontes, wrapped in gloomy silence,
Stretched forth his eager hand; the priest pronounced
The solemn words; amidst her weeping maids
Stood fixed in grief the wretched Mérope;
Slow she advanced, and trembling in these arms,
Instead of Hymen, called on death; the people
Were silent all; when from the holy threshold,

A more than mortal form, a youthful hero
Stepped forth, and sudden darted to the altar;
It was Ægisthus; there undaunted seized
The axe that for the holy festival
Had been prepared; then with the lightning's speed
He ran, and felled the tyrant; "Die," he cried,
"Usurper, die; now take your victim, gods."
Erox, the monster's vile accomplice, saw
His master weltering in his blood, upraised
His hand for vengeance; but Ægisthus smote
The slave, and laid him at the tyrant's feet:
Meantime, recovered, Poliphontes rose
And fought; I saw Ægisthus wounded; saw
The fierce encounter: the guards ran to part them;
When Mérope, such power has mighty love,
Pierced through opposing multitudes, and cried,
"Stop, ye inhuman murderers, 'tis my son,
'Tis my Ægisthus, turn your rage on me,
And plant your daggers in the breast of her
Who bore him, of his mother, and your queen:"
Her shrieks alarmed the crowd, and a firm band
Of faithful friends secured her from the rage
Of the rude soldiers; then might you behold
The broken altars, and the sacred ruins:
On every side, confusion, war, and slaughter
Triumphant reigned; brothers on brothers rose,
Children were butchered in their mothers' arms,
Friends murdered friends, the dying and the dead
Together lay, and o'er their bodies trampled
The flying crowd; with groans the temple rung.
Amidst the uproar of contending legions
I lost Ægisthus and the queen, and fled:
In vain I asked each passing stranger whither
They bent their way; their answers but increased
My terrors; still they cry, he falls, he's dead,

He conquers; all is darkness and confusion:
I ran, I flew, and by the timely aid
Of these kind friends have reached this place of safety:
But still I know not whether yet the queen
And great Ægisthus are preserved; my heart
Is full of terrors.

NARBAS.

Thou great arbiter
Of all that's mortal, providence divine,
Complete thy glorious work, protect the good,
Support the innocent, reward the wretched,
Preserve my son, and I shall die in peace!
Ha! midst yon crowd do I behold the queen?

SCENE VII.

MÉROPE, ISMENIA, NARBAS, *People, Soldiers.*

[*At the farther part of the stage is exposed the corpse of Poliphontes, covered with a bloody robe.*

MÉROPE.

Priests, warriors, friends, my fellow-citizens,
Attend, and hear me in the name of heaven.
Once more I swear, Ægisthus is your king,
The scourge of guilt, the avenger of his father,
And yonder bleeding corpse, a hated monster,
The foe of gods and men, who slew my husband,
My dear Cresphontes, and his helpless children,
Oppressed Messene, and usurped my kingdom,
Yet dared to offer me his savage hand,

Still reeking with the blood of half my race.
[*Meeting Ægisthus, who enters with the axe in his hand.*
But here behold Messene's royal heir,
My only hope, your queen's illustrious son,
Who conquered Poliphontes: see, my friends,
This good old man,
[*Pointing to Narbas.*
Who saved him from the tyrant,
And brought him here: the gods have done the rest.

NARBAS.

I call those gods to witness, 'tis your king;
He fought for them, and they protected him.

ÆGISTHUS.

O hear a mother pleading for her son,
And know me for your king! I have avenged
A father, I have conquered but for you.

MÉROPE.

If still ye doubt, look on his glorious wounds:
Who, but the great descendant of Alcides,
Could save Messene thus, and scourge a tyrant?
He will support his subjects, and avenge
An injured people: hark! the voice of heaven
Confirms your choice, and speaks to you in thunder;
It cries aloud, "Ægisthus is my son."

SCENE VIII.

MÉROPE, ÆGISTHUS, ISMENIA, NARBAS, EURICLES, *People.*

EURICLES.

O madam, show yourself to the pleased people,
The king's return has fixed their wavering minds,

And every heart is ours: the impatient crowd
Sheds tears of joy, and blesses your noble son:
Forever will they hold this glorious day
In sweet remembrance; ardently they long
To see their youthful sovereign, to behold
His faithful Narbas, and adore their queen:
The name of Poliphontes is detested;
Thine and the king's the praise of every tongue.
O haste, enjoy thy victory and thy fame;
Enjoy a nobler prize, thy people's love.

ÆGISTHUS.

To heaven ascribe the glory, not to me;
Thence comes our happiness, and thence our virtue:
While Mérope survives, I will not mount
Messene's throne, my joy shall be to place
A mother there; and thou, my dearest Narbas,
Shall be my friend, my guide, my father still.

END of the FIFTH and LAST ACT.

OLYMPIA

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MEN.

CASSANDER, Son of Antipater, King of Macedonia.
ANTIGONES, King of Part of Asia.
The Hierophants, or High Priest, who presides at the Celebration of the great Mysteries.
SOSTHENES an Officer of Cassander.
HERMAS, an Officer of Antigones.

WOMEN.

STATIRA, the Wife of Alexander.
OLYMPIA, the Daughter of Alexander and Statira.
Priests, Priestesses, Soldiers, Populace.

This play is based on the story of Cassandra. It was performed at Paris in 1762.

OLYMPIA.

SCENE I.

The back part of the theatre represents a temple, the doors of which are shut, and adorned with lofty pillars: the two wings form a vast porch. Sosthenes is seen in the porch. The great door opens; Cassander in great agitation approaches Sosthenes; and the great door is again shut.

CASSANDER, SOSTHENES.

CASSANDER.

These rites, O Sosthenes, must quickly end:
Cassander hopes to find propitious gods;
My days will soon more calmly glide away,
And my wild agitation will subside.
Already I feel ease———

SOSTHENES.

———Near Ephesus
The warlike chiefs who served your royal sire,
The oath accustomed in my presence swore.
All Macedon acknowledges your sway.
Her two protectors Ephesus has chosen.
The throne which with Antigones you share,
Will doubtless make your great designs succeed.
A reign, which with the worship of the gods
Begins, must doubtless be approved by men.
Initiation in the sacred rites,
Will make your diadem beheld with awe,
Appear in public.———

CASSANDER.

———Yet it is too soon.
When I possess the crown, your faithful eyes
Shall be the witnesses of all my deeds.
Stay in this porch, the priestesses to-day
Present Olympia to the powers divine:
This day in secret she must expiate,
Sins which are even to herself unknown.
This day a better life I shall begin.
O! dear Olympia, may you never know
The heinous crime that's hardly yet effaced,
To whom your birth you owe, what blood I've shed.

SOSTHENES.

Can then my lord, a girl in infancy,
Stolen on Euphrates' banks, and by your sire
Condemned to slavery, in your royal breast
Raise such a conflict?———

CASSANDER.

———Sosthenes, respect
A slave to whom the world should homage pay:
The wrongs of fate I labor to repair.
My father had his reasons to conceal
The noble blood to which she owed her birth.
What do I say? O cruel memory!
He set her down amongst the victims doomed
To bleed, that he might unmolested reign. . . . .
Although in cruelty and carnage bred
I pitied her, and turned my father's heart;
I who the mother stabbed, the daughter saved,
My frenzy and my crime she never knew.
Olympia, may thy error ever last,
Though as a benefactor thou dost love
Cassander, quickly he would have thy hate
Wert thou to know what blood his hands have shed.

SOSTHENES.

I don't into those secrets strive to pry.
Of your true interest I speak alone.
Of all the several monarchs who pretend
To Alexander's throne, Antigones,
And he alone, is to your cause a friend.

CASSANDER.

His friendship I have always held most dear.
I will to him be faithful—

SOSTHENES.

———He to you
Equal fidelity and friendship owes,
But since we've seen him enter first these walls,
His heart by secret jealousy seems filled,
And from your love he seems to be estranged.

CASSANDER.

What matters it? Oh, ever honored shades
Of Alexander and Statira—Dust
Of a famed hero, of a demi-god,
By my remorse you are enough avenged.
Olympia from their shades appeased obtain
The peace for which my heart so long has sighed;
Let your bright virtues all my fears dispel,
Be my defence and heaven propitiate;
But to this porch, just opened ere the day,
I see Antigones the king advance.

SCENE II.

CASSANDER, SOSTHENES, ANTIGONES, HERMAS.

ANTIGONES.

[*To Hermas behind.*

I must this secret know, it importunes me.

Even in his heart I'll read what he conceals.
Depart, but be at hand——

CASSANDER.

When scarce the sun
Darts his first rays, what cause can bring you here?

ANTIGONES.

Your interests, Cassander, since the gods
By penitence you have propitious made,
The earth between us we must strive to share.
No more war's horrors Ephesus dismay;
Your secret mysteries which awe inspire
Have banished discord and calamities.
Monarchs' contentions are awhile composed,
But this repose is short, and soon our climes
By flames and by the sword will be laid waste;
The sword's not sheathed nor flames extinguished yet.
Antipater's no more, your courage, cares,
His undertaking doubtless will complete,
The brave Antipater had never borne
To see Seleucus and the Lagides,
And treacherous Antiochus, insult
The tomb of Alexander, boldly seize
His conquests and his great successors brave.

CASSANDER.

Would to the gods that Alexander could
From heaven's height this daring man behold;
Would he were still alive—

ANTIGONES.

Your words surprise;
Can you then Alexander's loss regret?
What can to such a strange remorse give rise!
Of Alexander's death you're innocent.

CASSANDER.

Alas! I caused his death—

ANTIGONES.

——He justly fell.
That victim loudly all the Grecians claimed.
Long was the world of his ambition tired.
The poison that he drank from Athens came,
Perdiccas cast it in the sparkling bowl;
The bowl your father put into your hand,
But never intimated the design.
You then were young, you at the banquet served,
The banquet where the haughty tyrant died.

CASSANDER.

The impious parricide excuse no more.

ANTIGONES.

Can you then abjectly thus deify
The murderer of Clitus, whose fell rage
Destroyed Parmenio, and who, madly vain,
Dishonoring his mother durst aspire
To be a god, and adoration claimed?
'Tis he deserves the name of parricide;
And when at Babylon we cut him off,
When fate o'ertook him in the poisoned bowl,
We mortals and the gods at once revenged.

CASSANDER.

Although he had his faults, you still must own
He was a hero and our lawful king.

ANTIGONES.

A hero!——

CASSANDER.

——Doubtless he deserves the name.

ANTIGONES.

It was our valor, 'twas our arms, our blood,
To which the ungrateful wretch his conquests owed.

CASSANDER.

Ye tutelary gods!
Who could be more ungrateful than our sires?
All to that rank exalted strove to rise.
But wherefore were his wife and children slain?
Who can relate the horrors of that day?

ANTIGONES.

This late repentance fills me with surprise.
Jealous and quite suspicious of his friends
He had become a Persian, and espoused
A daughter of Darius; we were slaves.
Do you then wish that, furious for revenge,
Statira had his subjects roused to arms,
And to his shade had sacrificed us all?
She armed them all, Antipater himself
That day with difficulty escaped her rage.
A father's life you saved——

CASSANDER.

——'Tis true, but still
This hand the wife of Alexander slew.

ANTIGONES.

It is the fate of combats, our success
Should not be followed by regret and tears.

CASSANDER.

After the fatal stroke I wept I own,
And, stained with that august but hapless blood,
Astonished at myself and mad with grief
For what my father forced me to commit,
I long have groaned in secret—

ANTIGONES.

——But declare
Wherefore to-day you feel these pangs of grief.
A friend should to a friend his heart disclose,
You still dissemble———

CASSANDER.

Friend, what can I say?
Depend upon it there's a time the heart
To virtue's paths by instinct's force returns;
And when the memory of former guilt
With terror harrows up the frighted soul—

ANTIGONES.

Of murders expiated think no more;
But let us to our interests still attend.
If your soul must be ruffled by remorse,
Repent that you've abandoned Asia's plains
To insolent Antiochus's sway.
May my brave warriors and your valiant Greeks
Again with terror shake Euphrates' shores:
Of all these upstart kings, elate with pride,
Not one is worthy of the name, not one
Like us has served Darius' conqueror.
Our chiefs are all cut off———

CASSANDER.

————Perhaps the gods
Have sacrificed them to their monarch's shade.

ANTIGONES.

We who still live should labor to restore
The few who have survived the general wreck.
The victor dying, to the worthiest left
His host, who saves it is the man he meant.
My fortune and your own at once secure,
The strongest all men must the worthiest own.

The fallen powers of Greece let's raise again:
Let discord from our councils be removed,
Lest to these tyrants we should fall a prey;
They were not born to vie with men like us.
Say, will you second me?———

CASSANDER.

———My friend, I swear
I'm ready to assert our common cause.
Unworthy hands have Asia's sceptre seized,
Nile and the Euphrates both are tyrannized;
I'll fight for you, for Greece and for myself.

ANTIGONES.

Interest your promise dictates; both I trust,
But much more in your friendship I confide,
That secret tie by which we both are bound.
But of your friendship I require a proof:
Do not refuse it.

CASSANDER.

By your doubt I'm wronged.
If what you ask is in my power, your will
I as a sacred order shall obey.

ANTIGONES.

Perhaps you will consider with surprise
The trifle which in friendship's name I ask;
'Tis but a slave——.

CASSANDER.

———All mine you may command,
They're prostrate at your feet, choose which you will.

ANTIGONES.

A foreign damsel, suffer me to ask,
In Babylon made captive by your sire.

She's yours by lot, I claim her as the prize
Of labors which for you I've undergone.
Your father used her hardly I am told,
But in my court she'll meet with due respect.
Her name's Olympia——

CASSANDER.

Olympia!

ANTIGONES.

That's the fair one's name.

CASSANDER.

How unexpectedly he wounds my heart!
Must I resign Olympia?

ANTIGONES.

Hear me, friend,
I hope I shall Cassander grateful find;
In trifles a refusal may offend,
And sure you do not mean to injure me.

CASSANDER.

No, you shall soon the youthful slave behold;
You shall yourself decide if 'twould be fit
That I should give her up at your request:
To this shrine none profane can find access.
Under the inspection of the powers divine,
Olympia 'midst the priestesses remains.
The gates will open at the proper time
Within this porch, to which access is free;
My coming wait, and all complaint suspend.
New mysteries may strike you with surprise;
You quickly may determine whether kings
Can to Olympia now have any claim.
[*He enters the temple again, and Sosthenes goes out.*]

SCENE III.

ANTIGONES and HERMAS *in the porch.*

HERMAS.

My lord, you move my wonder, whilst alarms
Disturb all Asia, and a hundred kings
For power supreme in fields of blood contend;
When fortune Alexander's wide domains
Prepares amongst the valiant to divide.
Whilst greatly you to sovereign sway lay claim,
Can a slave be the object of your wish?

ANTIGONES.

Your wonder's just; but reasons, which to none
I dare disclose, to this pursuit excite.
Perhaps this slave may of importance prove
To Asia's kings; to all men who aspire;
To him who in his bosom bears a heart
Which nobly aims at Alexander's throne.
Strangest conjectures long my soul has framed
Upon the slave's adventures, and her name.
I sought for information; oft my eyes
Have gazed upon her from these ramparts' height.
The time and place to which she owes her birth,
The great respect which even a master shows her,
Cassander's sorrow and obscure discourse,
With fresh suspicions have my soul inspired;
The mystery dark, I think, I can see through.

HERMAS.

He loves her, I am told; and, with the care
Of a kind father, educates her youth.

ANTIGONES.

We'll know the truth, but see, the temple opens
And shows the sacred altar decked with flowers.
The priestesses are ranged on either side;
The high priest sits within the sacred shrine,
Cassander and Olympia now advance.

SCENE IV.

The three doors of the temple are opened. The inside of the temple is discovered. The priests advance slowly on one side, and the priestesses on the other. They are all clothed in white raiment, with blue girdles, the ends of which touch the ground. Cassander and Olympia lay their hands on the altar. Antigones and Hermas stand in the porch.

CASSANDER.

Oh God of kings and gods, eternal mind
Who in these sacred mysteries stand revealed;
Who dost the wicked punish, and the just
Support, with whom remorse atones for crimes:
Great God confirm the vows which here I make.
Olympia, heavenly fair! those vows receive;
To you my throne, my life I dedicate.
A love as pure, as holy as the fire
Of Vesta, which ne'er dies, I promise here,
To heaven devoted, priestesses august,
Receive the vows and promises I make;
Bear them in clouds of incense to the throne
Of listening gods, and may they still avert
The punishment that's due to crimes like mine.

OLYMPIA.

Protect, O gods! in whom I put my trust,
The master who supplied a father's care;
Let my kind lover and my husband still
Be dear to you, and worthy of your care.
My heart is to you known, his rank, his crown
Are the least gifts which on me he bestows:
'Tis yours to answer for my ardent flame,
Who here bear witness to its purity.
May I from him to please you learn, and may
Your justice doom me to the infernal shades,
If faithless to your laws I e'er forget
My former state, and what I owe to him.

CASSANDER.

Let's to the shrine return, where bliss invites.
The solemn pomp you priestesses prepare,
The pomp from which my happiness I date;
Sanctify both my passion and my life,
I've at the temple seen the gods, in her
I see them; may they hate me if I am false.
Antigones, you hear what I have said,
Sufficient answer have I now returned?
Acknowledge now that you should cease to claim
Cassander's slave; know even my throne itself,
And all my grandeur, are below her worth.
Whatever friendship may unite our hearts,
You cannot such a sacrifice expect.

[*They enter the temple again, and the doors are shut.*]

SCENE V.

ANTIGONES, HERMAS.

ANTIGONES.

I doubt no more, I have discovered all.
He braved me, but his ruin is at hand.
He's ardent and impetuous, and prone
Sometimes to serve the gods, sometimes offend;
The world has many characters like his,
Made up of passion and religious zeal.
With headlong passion, tenderness they mix,
They oft repent, and all things undertake.
He says he weds a slave, ah, never think
That love could make him so debase himself.
That slave is of a race himself respects,
His secret machinations I surmise.
He thinks in virtue of Olympia's rights
He one day may become supreme of kings.
Had love alone been master of his breast,
He had not from me kept it thus concealed.
His friendship weak, you'll quickly see give place
To rancor and inveterate enmity.

HERMAS.

Perhaps to his infatuated heart,
Designs too deep for lovers you ascribe;
Our actions oft, even in our great concerns,
Are but effects which from our passions spring.
Their power tyrannic, we in vain disguise,
The weak is oft a politician deemed;
Cassander's not the first king who has stooped
To love a slave, and raise her to his bed.

Heroes have often, by their flames subdued,
Yielded to women, whilst they monarchs braved.

ANTIGONES.

What you have said is just, you reason right,
But all I see, suspicion has confirmed.
Shall I avow the truth? Olympia's charms
Have jealousy excited in my soul:
My secret sentiments too plain you see.
Perhaps love mingles with these great concerns.
More than I thought, their marriage grieves my soul.
Cassander's not the only man that's weak.

HERMAS.

But he relied upon you. Can then kings
Never be to the laws of friendship true?
Nor your alliance, nor your fellowship
In arms, the dangers which you both have shared,
Nor oaths redoubled, nor united cares,
Can save you from the woes that discord brings.
Is then true friendship banished from the earth?

ANTIGONES.

I know to friendship Greece has temples raised,
To interest none, though interest's there adored.
At once with love and with ambition blind
Cassander hides from me Olympia's birth.
Cassander views me with a jealous eye:
He's in the right; perhaps this very day
The object of his wishes will be mine.
[*The initiated, the priests and the priestesses pass over the stage in procession, with garlands of flowers in their hands.*]

HERMAS.

He has received her hand, the sacred shrine
Already sees their nuptial pomp prepared;

The initiated, followed by the priests,
With garlands in their hands, attend in crowds,
Over the rites love's sacred power presides.

ANTIGONES.

His conquest may be ravished from him soon:
I shall on your fidelity rely.
Gods, laws, and people, will for me declare.
Let us a moment fly these odious pomps,
And take the measures my designs require;
Let us pollute this sanctuary o'er,
Not with the blood of bulls, but human gore.

End of the first ACT.

ACT II. SCENE I.

The three doors of the temple are opened. Though this scene and many others, are supposed to pass in the innermost part of the temple, as theatres are not built in a manner favorable to the voice, the performers are obliged to advance forward towards the porch; but the three doors of the temple are open, to show that they are supposed to be in the temple.

THE HIEROPHANTS, THE PRIESTS, AND THE PRIESTESSES.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

What in these sacred days, this shrine august,
When God consoles the just, and sins forgives,
Shall one of all the priestesses presume
To interrupt the rites, and disobey?
Must Arzane from duty be exempt?

ONE OF THE PRIESTESSES.

Arzane bent on silence in retreat,
Bathes with her tears the statues of the gods;

She hides herself, my lord, from every eye;
A prey to grief, and weakened by her woes,
And wishes death may end her misery.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Her woes we pity, but she must obey;
Let her a moment at the rites attend.
Since she has lain concealed in her retreat,
First on this day her presence is required.
Bid her approach, the sacred will of heaven
[*The inferior priestess goes in quest of Arzane.*]
Calls to the altar, and won't brook delay.
Adorned by her with wreaths of gayest flowers,
Olympia must before the gods be led.
Initiated in our sacred rites,
Cassander must be purified by her;
Our mysteries soon must be complete, and all
The orders of the gods must be obeyed;
They never vary, are forever fixed,
Nor like the changeful laws of humankind.

SCENE II.

THE HIEROPHANTS, THE PRIESTS AND PRIESTESSES, STATIRA.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

[*To Statira.*

You must not duty's sacred call neglect,
Nor your most holy ministry decline.
Since in this blest asylum first you made
The vow, which never more can be recalled;
Upon this day first by the gods you're chosen
Their laws to Asia's victors to declare.
Be worthy of the god you represent.

STATIRA.

[*Covered with a veil which does not conceal her features.*]

Oh heavens, why after fifteen years that here,
Within deep solitudes and silent walls,
Remote from mankind, fate has buried me;
Why do you force me from obscurity?
Why do you bring me to the light and woe?
[*To the Hierophants.*
My lord, when to this temple I repaired,
'Twas but to weep, and die in secret here.
You know that was my purpose—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—Other laws
The will of heaven prescribes you on this day,
And since at nuptials now you first preside,
Your name, your rank no longer must be hid.
You must declare them—

STATIRA.

—Sir, what matter these?
The blood of beggars and the blood of kings,
Are they not equal in the sight of heaven?
By heaven we're better known than by ourselves,
Great names might formerly have dazzled me;
They're all forgotten in the silent tomb,
Let them be ever blotted from my mind.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Vain glory and ambition we renounce,
In this point we're agreed, but still the gods
Exact a full confession of the truth.
Say all, you shudder—

STATIRA.

—So you will yourself.
[*To the Priests and Priestesses.*
You, who on heaven's high majesty attend,
Who share my fate, whose lives are passed in prayer,
Religiously my secret ever keep.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

We swear it solemnly.

STATIRA.

—Ere I proceed,
Say, is Cassander, that blood-thirsty man,
Admitted to your sacred mysteries?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Madam, he is—

STATIRA.

—Are then his crimes atoned?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Of mercy every mortal stands in need.
If innocence alone could heaven approach,
Who in this temple would the gods adore?
All human virtue from repentance springs.
Such is the eternal order of the gods.
Mortals are guilty, but heaven pardons all.

STATIRA.

If you then knew the barbarous, horrid deeds
Which make him sue for grace and vengeance dread,
If you knew that by him his master fell,
A master dear to heaven, and if you knew
What blood he shed within these flaming walls,
When even in dying Alexander's eyes,
He gored the bosom of his weeping queen,

And threw her dying on her husband's corpse,
You'll still be more surprised when I've revealed
Secrets as yet unknown to human kind.
That wife who once on glory's summit sat,
Whose memory bleeding Persia honors still,
Darius' daughter, Alexander's wife,
She's here before you, ask her nothing more.
[*The priests and priestesses lift up their hands and bend their bodies.*]

THE HIEROPHANTS.

What have I heard, you gods whom crimes offend,
How do you strike your images on earth?
Statira in this temple, give me leave
Respect profoundest—

STATIRA.

—Rise, thou reverend priest,
No longer am I mistress of the world,
Only respect the anguish of my mind.
In me of human greatness see the fate.
What my sire found the moment of his death,
I found in Babylon when drenched in blood
Darius, king of kings of throne deprived,
A fugitive in deserts, quite forlorn,
By his own treacherous followers was slain,
A stranger, wretched outcast of the earth,
Consoled his misery in his dying hour,
See you that woman to my court a stranger.
[*Showing the inferior priestess.*
Her hand, her hand alone preserved my life.
'Twas she that brought me from the slaughtered heap
Where my base friends had left me to expire;
She is of Ephesus; my steps she led
To this asylum on my realm's confines.

I saw my spoils by numerous plunderers torn,
The field strewed o'er with dying and the dead,
All Alexander's soldiers raised to kings,
And public robberies called great exploits.
The world I hated and its various woes;
I left it, and lived here interred alive.
I own I mourn a daughter much beloved,
Torn from me whilst I weltered in my gore.
This stranger here is all my family.
My husband, daughter, and Darius lost,
Heaven's my resource alone—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—Be heaven your prop.
From the throne which you lost to heaven you rise,
God's temple is your court, be happy there.
Your grandeur though august was dangerous,
The throne was terrible, forget it quite
And look upon it with a pitying eye.

STATIRA.

This temple, sir, sometimes has calmed my griefs,
But you may well conceive how much I'm shocked
At seeing by Cassander the same gods
Implored whom I've invoked against his head.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

This, I acknowledge, needs must give you pain:
But our law speaks to you and must be heard.
You have embraced it.—

STATIRA.

—Could I ever think
It would so horrid an injunction lay?
The torch of my sad days grows pale and dim,
And these last moments which high heaven bestows
What purpose serve they?—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—You'll perhaps forgive,
You have yourself traced out your great career.
Proceed in it and never look behind.
Shades when unbound from cumbrous, fleshly chains,
Taste lasting rest, and are from passion free.
A new day gives them light, a cloudless day;
They live for heaven, their lot is like to ours.
Soon on our hearts a blest retreat bestows
Oblivion of our enemies and griefs.

STATIRA.

I'm priestess now, 'tis true, though once a queen,
My duty's harsh, oh! with my weakness bear.
What must I do?—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—Olympia on her knees
Will soon appear before you, then 'tis yours
To bless the marriage of the illustrious pair.

STATIRA.

I'll reconcile her to a life of woe,
That is the lot of mortals.———

THE HIEROPHANTS.

———The incense,
The water for ablution, and the gifts
Offered up to the gods, your royal hands
Shall bear, and at their sacred shrine present.

STATIRA.

For whom should I present them, wretch—must then
My life be filled with horror to its close?
In my retreat I thought to 'scape from woe,

Oh fruitless hope! woe everywhere abounds:
Let me obey the law which I have made.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Farewell, I both lament you and admire.
Behold, she comes. [*Exit.*

SCENE III.

STATIRA and OLYMPIA.

STATIRA.

[*The stage shakes.*

Dark and awful cells,
You shake, a horrid murmur strikes my ear:
The temple quakes, must nature then be moved
When she appears, must all my senses fail,
And the same trouble and confusion feel?

OLYMPIA.

[*Terrified.*

Ah madam!

STATIRA.

Young, tender victim to the nuptial law,
Approach. These frightful omens crime denote,
Such charms as yours for virtue's self seem made.

OLYMPIA.

My sinking courage, oh just gods support!
Oh you, the confidant of their decrees,
Deign to direct my innocence and youth.
I claim your care, my terror dissipate.

STATIRA.

Alas, mine yours exceeds, embrace me, daughter,
Do you then know your husband's history,
Or do you know your country or your birth?

OLYMPIA.

Of humble birth, I never did expect
My present rank, to which I have no right.
Cassander, madam's king, he deigned in Greece
To educate me at his father's court.
Since I've been near his person, I have seen
In him the greatest of all human kind.
The husband's dear, the master is revered;
Thus have I all my sentiments made known.

STATIRA.

How easily a youthful heart's deceived!
How much I love your candid innocence!
Cassander, then, has taken charge of you.
Do you not from some king derive your birth?

OLYMPIA.

Can none love virtue or obey its laws,
But such as from a kingly race descend?

STATIRA.

I think not so, guilt dwells too near the throne.

OLYMPIA.

I was a slave, no more.———

STATIRA.

———I'm much surprised
Upon your front august, and in your eyes,
In every noble feature of your face
We read the virtues of a royal mind.
Could you be then a slave?

OLYMPIA.

———Antipater
Seized on my infancy by chance of war.
All to his son I owe.———

STATIRA.

———Your first days thus
Have felt misfortunes, which at length have ceased;
My woes have been as lasting as my life.
Say where and when you were by fate involved
In ills which brought you to captivity?

OLYMPIA.

I'm told a king, the world's victorious lord
Was slain, and rivals for his empire strove;
That whilst it was by fierce contentions torn,
In Babylon Cassander saved my life,
When it was threatened by the murderous blade.

STATIRA.

In days made sad by Alexander's death,
Were you then captive of Antipater,
And did you by Cassander's favors live?

OLYMPIA.

I never could learn more. Misfortunes past
Felicity has banished from my thought.

STATIRA.

Captive at Babylon; eternal powers
Do you then make of mortals' woes your sport?
The time, the place, her age, have in my soul
At once roused joy, grief, tenderness, and dread.
Am I not then deceived? Upon her face
My valiant husband's image is impressed. . . . .

OLYMPIA.

What say you?———

STATIRA.

———Heavens! such looks the hero cast,
When mild and from the bloody field retired!

He raised my family, which scarce had escaped
The insatiate fury of the murderous blade!
When he raised all my fallen family
To their first rank, and when his hand touched mine!
Illusion dear! enchanting hope! but vain.
Can it be possible! List, princess, list,
Pity the agitation of my soul!
Have you no memory of a mother left!

OLYMPIA.

Those who have had it in their power to tell
Of the transactions of my infancy,
Informed me that I, in those days of slaughter,
Was even, when in my cradle, made a slave.
A mother's fondness ne'er to me was known.
I know not who I am, from whom I'm sprung.
Alas, you sigh, you weep; my trickling tears
I mix with yours, and in them I find charms.
With faint embrace your languid arms clasp me;
Your organs fail; you strive to speak, in vain.
Speak to me.—

STATIRA.

My utterance fails, I sink, I'm overwhelmed;
The trouble which I feel will end my days.

SCENE IV.

STATIRA, OLYMPIA, THE HIEROPHANTS.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Priestess of heaven, and queen of human race,
Say what new change has happened in your fate?
What must we do? What art thou now to hear?

STATIRA.

Misfortunes, but I'm now prepared for all.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

The greatest good is ever dashed with grief;
No bliss is pure. Antigones's rage,
The troops, the citizens that rise in arms,
The general voice, by ardent zeal inspired,
All these things prove the object you behold,
Like you long buried in obscurity.
The object which your hands should to Cassander
This day have given, Olympia—

STATIRA.

———What means this!

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Is daughter of the late victorious king.

STATIRA.

[*Running to embrace Olympia.*

My torn heart had told me this before.
My child! my daughter! dear, but fatal names;
Do I then press you in a close embrace,
When by your marriage thus you wound my soul!

OLYMPIA.

Does then to be my mother make you grieve?

STATIRA.

No, I thank heaven, whose anger long I felt,
Nature pleads loudly, joy pours on my soul;
But heaven deprives me of the promised bliss.
You are to wed Cassander.—

OLYMPIA.

If from you
Olympia is descended, if the love
A parent bears a child inspires your heart,
Cassander surely never could offend.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

You are descended from her, doubt it not;
Cassander owns and will attest the truth.
With him united, may you both find means
To make two hostile races live in peace.

OLYMPIA.

Is he your foe then, am I so accursed?

STATIRA.

The villain poisoned your victorious sire;
He plunged his dagger in your mother's breast,
Even in her breast whose hapless womb first bore you;
He plunged the steel which oft had princes pierced:
Even to this temple he pursues my steps;
The gods he braves, pretending to appease:
He tears you from your weeping mother's arms,
And can you ask me why I hate this man?

OLYMPIA.

Does then the conqueror's family survive?
Are you his widow; is he then my sire?
Have I my mother's assassin espoused?
Am I become an object of your wrath,
And is this marriage then a horrid crime?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Hope in the gods—

OLYMPIA.

Ah, if their ruthless hate
To my soul's wishes can no hopes afford;
Opening my eyes a pit they opened before me.
Knowing myself too well I know my fate.
My great misfortune is to know my birth,
Before the altar where you joined our hands
I should have fallen, and at your feet expired.

SCENE V.

STATIRA, OLYMPIA, THE HIEROPHANTS,
and a priest.

THE PRIEST.

The temple's threatened, all our mysteries
Quickly will be profaned by impious hands;
The two contending kings dispute the right
There to command where gods alone should sway.
Groans heard within these vaults foreboded this,
In sign of this the ground shook under us.
The gods denounce some change to mortal man,
The earth offends them; they must be appeased.
The furious people whom fell discord fires
Run headlong to this temple's sacred porch;
Two rival factions Ephesus divide.
Like other nations we shall be at strife;
Morals, peace, sanctity, shall all give way;
Kings shall prevail and we shall have a Lord.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Ah may they bear from Ephesus their crimes,
And leave one place of refuge to the earth:
Oh royal mother sprung from royal race,
Olympia, shall I say Cassander's wife?
Before these altars you'll protection find.
To daring kings I shall present myself.
I know how much respect is due to crowns,
But more by far is due to Heaven that gives them.
Let them keep fair with Heaven if they would reign:
We have not arms or soldiers, it is true,
Our power we only from our laws derive.

God's my support, his temple's my defence,
Should tyranny once dare to make approach.
My bloody corpse awhile shall bar its way.
[*The Hierophants go out with the inferior priest.*

SCENE VI.

STATIRA, OLYMPIA.

STATIRA.

Oh fate! oh God of altars and of thrones!
Oppose Cassander, shield Antigones.
I must, my daughter, in my close of life
Aid only from my enemies expect,
And look for vengeance in my misery
From the usurpers of your father's throne;
From my own subjects who with jealous rage
Contend for states of which I was possessed!
They're now my masters; once they were my slaves.
Oh noble race of Cyrus the renowned,
How from thy ancient glory art thou fallen!
So vain is greatness, thou art known no more.

OLYMPIA.

Mother, I follow you, in this sad day
Render me worthy of your glorious name;
To do my duty's all I hope for now.

STATIRA.

Sprung from a king who over kings has reigned,
Do that and equal glory thou hast gained.

End of the Second Act.

ACT III. SCENE I.

(The Temple is shut.)

CASSANDER, SOSTHENES.

CASSANDER.

[*Within the porch.*

The truth prevails, no more can I suppress
The fatal secret by my sire concealed:
Forced to the public voice at length to yield
To a king's daughter I have justice done;
Should I then longer injure royal blood
By cruel silence keeping it concealed?
Already I've incurred enough of guilt.

SOSTHENES.

A jealous rival of Olympia's name
Avails himself intent upon your ruin;
The people he excites, the town's alarmed.
Antigones religious zeal contemns,
And yet has blown its fire to tenfold rage.
'Tis thought a shocking crime in you to wed
The daughter, you who had the mother slain.

CASSANDER.

Ye gods, the keen reproaches of my heart
Torture me more than all the Ephesians say.
The hearts of all the citizens I've calmed,
Yet still my own is by the furies torn
Victim of love and of my cruelty.
I would have had her all things owe to me,
Not know a fate replete with horrors dire.
Her sire's dominions to her I restored.

Transmitted from Antipater to me.
Blest in the favors on my love conferred,
I was to calm tranquillity restored,
I had repaired all wrongs, and justice done.
My heart indeed was conscious of no crime;
I killed Statira by the chance of war,
Even whilst I strove to save a father's life.
'Twas in the heat of slaughter and of rage
When duty to excess my valor drove;
'Twas in the blindness which a sable cloud
Of horror shed upon my darkened eyes;
I shuddered to think on it e'er I felt
The fatal passion which enslaved my soul,
I thought myself acquitted in the sight
Of God and of the world, not in my own,
Nor in Olympia's, that's what racks my soul;
Despair lies that way; she must either choose
To seal my pardon or to pierce my heart,
This heart that burns with love's consuming fire.

SOSTHENES.

'Tis said, Olympia to this temple brought
Can here retract the faith which she has sworn.

CASSANDER.

I know it, Sosthenes, and if this law
Should be abused by her my soul adores,
Woe to my rival and the temple too;
Though I am here a model of true zeal,
The temple I'd a scene of vengeance make.
But let me banish far this terror vain;
I am beloved, her heart was ever mine;
The god of love shall undertake my cause:
To her upon the wings of love I fly.

SCENE II.

CASSANDER, SOSTHENES, THE HIEROPHANTS.

[Coming out of the Temple.

CASSANDER.

Interpreter of heaven and minister
Of clemency, I in this solemn day
Have from your temple banished war's alarms:
I have not fought against Antigones.
Days to peace consecrated I revered;
That peace to my distracted soul restore.
My rites are numerous, I'll defend them all;
Let us conclude this marriage. But first say
What does the daughter of the conqueror?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

My lord, Olympia duties now fulfils,
Duties most sacred, to her heart most dear.

CASSANDER.

Mine shares them. Where's the priestess whose kind hand
Is to present the bride and bless our loves?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

She'll bring her quickly, may such glorious ties
Not end in the destruction of you both.

CASSANDER.

Alas! upon this very day the woes
I long groaned under seemed to have an end.
For the first time a moment of repose
Seemed to becalm the troubles of my soul.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Perhaps Olympia's woe surpasses yours.

CASSANDER.

What do you say? can she have aught to fear?

THE HIEROPHANTES. [*Going.*

Too soon you'll know it—

CASSANDER.

Stay, explain yourself.
Do you espouse Antigones's cause?

THE HIEROPHANTES.

Forbid it, Heaven, that I should pass the bounds
Which to my zeal my duty has prescribed.
The din of factions, the intrigues of courts,
The passions that distract the human soul
Have never troubled our obscure retreats;
We lift pure hands unto the God we serve.
Contests of kings too much to discord prone
We learn but with intention to compose;
And of their greatness we should never hear
Did they not often need our friendly prayers.
I go, my lord, to invoke the immortal gods
For you, Olympia, and for many more.

CASSANDER.

Olympia!

THE HIEROPHANTES.

This moment to the temple she returns.
Try if she still will own you for her lord.
I leave you.

[*He goes out, and the temple opens.*

SCENE III.

CASSANDER, SOSTHENES, STATIRA, OLYMPIA.

CASSANDER.

By heaven she trembles! and I quake all o'er;
You cast upon the ground your streaming eyes!
You turn aside that face where nature's hand
With the most strong expression traced at once
The noblest and the tenderest of souls!

OLYMPIA.

[*Throwing herself into her mother's arms.*

Ah cruel man! ah madam!

CASSANDER.

Speak, explain
This agitation. Wherefore do you fly me?
Whose arms do you run into? What means this?
Why must my anxious soul be thus alarmed?
Who is't attends and bathes you with her tears?

STATIRA.

[*Unveiling and turning towards Cassander.*

Hast thou forgot me?———

CASSANDER.

———At that voice, those looks
My blood runs cold. Where am I? What means this?

STATIRA.

That thou'rt a villain———

CASSANDER.

Is Statira here?

STATIRA.

Behold, thou wretch, the widow of thy lord,
Olympia's mother.———

CASSANDER.

Oh you bolts of Jove,
Against my guilty head point all your rage.

STATIRA.

Thou shouldst have sooner for destruction prayed,
Eternal enemy of me and mine,
If 'twas the will of heaven that both my throne
And husband to thy rage should owe their fall,
If amidst carnage, in that day of crimes
Thy cowardice and cruelty was such,
That thou couldst pierce a woman's breast, and plunge
Her body in the flood of gore she shed,
Leave me what of that hapless blood remains.
Must you be ever fatal to my peace?
Tear not my daughter from my heart, my arms,
Deprive me not of her whom heaven restores,
Respect the place of refuge which I've chosen,
That from earth's tyrants I might live retired.
Monster to crimes inured, cease, cease at length
In sacred tombs to persecute the dead.

CASSANDER.

Less dread the voice of thunder would inspire;
I dare not prostrate kiss the ground before you;
I own I am made unworthy by my crimes,
If in excuse war's horrors I should urge,
If I should say I was imposed upon
When the illustrious hero was cut off,
That I to serve my sire took arms against you,
I should not pacify your angry soul.

You'll no excuse admit, though I might say
I saved your daughter whom my soul adores;
That at your feet I lay my crown and realms.
All makes against me, no defence you'll hear,
Soon to my wretched life I'll put an end,
A life whose punishment outweighs its guilt,
If your own child, spite of herself and me,
Did not attach me to detested life.
Your daughter I brought up with tender care,
And to her friends' and father's place supplied;
She has my every wish, my heart; the gods
Perhaps have made us in this temple meet,
That we by Hymen's sacred ties might change,
The horrors of our destiny to bliss.

STATIRA.

Heavens! what a match. Could you the villain wed
Who slew your sire, and would have murdered me?

OLYMPIA.

No, no, extinguished ever be the torch,
The guilty torch of nuptials so accursed:
Blot from my heart the shocking memory
Of those dire bands which were to join our hands.
My soul prefers, you'll wonder at the choice,
Your ashes to the sceptre he bestows.
I must not hesitate; in your kind arms,
Let me forget his love, and all his crimes.
Your daughter loving him partook his guilt.
Forgive me, my dire sacrifice accept:
Think not his villainies involve my heart,
But keep me, keep me ever from his sight.

STATIRA.

Thou showest a spirit worthy of thy race,
These sentiments revive my drooping soul.

Eternal gods, could you have then decreed
That with these hands I should Olympia give
To the most barbarous of the human race?.
Can you exact it of me? Such a deed
The priestess and the mother both disclaim.
You pitied me, it was not your design
That I so dire a duty should perform . . . .
Villain, no more the altar and the throne
Insult, the walls of Babylon you stained
With this heart's blood, but I would rather see
That blood shed now by such a parricide,
Than see my foe, my subject—see Cassander
Presume audaciously to proffer love
To Alexander's daughter, and to mine.

CASSANDER.

Still with more rigor I condemn myself;
But then I love, to frantic love give way.
Olympia's mine; who was her sire I know;
Like him I am a king, I have the right,
I have the power, in fine, Olympia's mine.
Her fate and mine are not to be disjoined.
Neither her fears nor you, the gods, my crimes,
Nor aught shall break a tie so sanctified;
The gods did not my penitence reject.
When they united us they pardoned all.
But if you'd rob me of my charming bride,
Whose hand I have received and plighted faith,
This blood you first must shed, pluck out this heart
Which beats for her alone, which you detest.
No privilege your altars shall protect,
Who murdered now shall sacrilege commit.
I'll from this temple, from your very arms,
From the unpitying gods bear off my wife.
I seek for death, 'tis my desire, my wish.

But I'll the husband of Olympia die.
In spite of you I'll carry to the grave
The tenderest love, and most illustrious name,
And grief for an involuntary crime,
Which will the manes of her sire appease.
[*Exit Cassander with Sosthenes.*

SCENE IV.

STATIRA, OLYMPIA.

STATIRA.

What horrid blasphemies have reached my ear?
Daughter, how dearly for thy life I pay!
The horrors which I feel you suffer, too,
My grief I in your eyes conspicuous read;
Our hearts still sympathize. Your kind embraces
And deep-fetched sighs console my wounded soul;
Because you share my griefs, I feel them less;
In you I find a shelter from the storm.
I brave my fate since you possess a heart
Worthy of Alexander and of me.

OLYMPIA.

Heaven knows my heart was ne'er by nature formed
To copy after yours, to be inspired
By such high sentiments, such swelling virtues.
O widow of famed Alexander, sprung
From famed Darius, wherefore being torn
From thy maternal arms, was I brought up
By this Cassander, thy most mortal foe?
Why on Olympia did your assassin
Unasked new favors every day confer?

Why did he not with cruel hand oppress me?
Too dangerous favors! why was I beloved?
Heavens, who do I behold in this retreat!
[*Antigones advances.*

SCENE V.

STATIRA, OLYMPIA, ANTIGONES.

ANTIGONES.

——Retire not queen.
You see a king by Alexander taught.
His widow I respect and will defend.
You from that altar's foot again might rise
To the high rank which you possessed before;
Replace your daughter there, and vengeance take
Of that proud ravisher who injures both.
Your story's known, and every heart is yours;
All men are weary of those tyrants' yoke,
Who at your husband's death the empire seized.
Your name this revolution will support;
As your defender will you own me here?

STATIRA.

Yes, if 'tis pity that directs your heart,
And if this friendly offer is sincere.

ANTIGONES.

I will not suffer an audacious youth
To gain a double right to Cyrus' throne,
When of your virtuous daughter's hand possessed.
He is unworthy, and I cannot doubt
But you will never grant him your consent.
I have not to the priest explained myself:
Though I came hither as a worshipper,

Who to the gods for clemency applies,
I come before you with fierce vengeance armed.
The widow of the conqueror may forget
Her greatness, but the honor of her race
She never can forget or overlook.

STATIRA.

I'm weary both of life and of the throne;
One's taken from me, the other near an end.
If from an impious ravisher you snatch
The only comfort heaven has left my woe:
If you protect her and avenge her sire,
I'll own you as my tutelary god.
Oh! sir, whilst on life's utmost verge I stand,
Preserve my daughter from the dangerous crime
Of marrying him whose bloody malice strove
Her hapless mother to deprive of life.

ANTIGONES.

Say worthy offspring of the conqueror,
Dost thou accept the offer which I make?

OLYMPIA.

Cassander I should hate.——

ANTIGONES.

——You then must grant
The prize, the noble prize I come to ask.
Against my all I will assert your cause,
Since I deserve you be my recompense.
'Tis this I ask, all other prize I scorn,
Such worth should never be Cassander's lot;
Speak: the unequalled glory I will owe
To this right arm, the queen, and to yourself.

STATIRA.

Decide.——

OLYMPIA.

—My scattered spirits let me first
Awhile recover. Scarce my eyes are opened,
Trembling and terrified from slavery,
I to this temple's hallowed cells retire,
Sprung from Statira and a demi-god;
A mother in this shrine august I find
Divested of her name, her rank, her all,
And hardly from a dream of death awakened.
I as a benefactor wed the man
Whose dagger had my mother's bosom gored.
While thus disasters compass me about,
Your arm you offer to avenge my cause.
What answer can I make? . . . At such a time
[*Embracing her mother.*
'Tis here that my first duties are required.
Judge if the torch of Hymen's e'er was made
To yield its light amidst this gloom of woe:
See in one day how I'm with ills o'erwhelmed,
And think not I can listen now to love.

STATIRA.

I'll answer for her, heaven decrees her to you.
Perhaps in former times the majesty—
Or call it pride—of my imperial throne,
My daughter to a subject had denied,
But you deserve her since you would defend,
'Twas you that Alexander meant his heir.
He named the worthiest, you the worthiest prove.
His throne you have a right to, who support.
May the unceasing favor of the gods
Second you, may their power to empire raise.
Both Alexander and his queen interred
He in his tomb, and I within these walls,
Will see you on our throne without regret:

And may henceforth the fates, grown less severe,
Oppose for you that strange fatality,
Which oft has overwhelmed that throne in blood.

ANTIGONES.

It shall be raised by fair Olympia's hand.
To Asia's people show yourself and her.
Quit this asylum. All things I'll prepare
Your husband to avenge, and fill his place.

[*Exit Antigones.*

SCENE VI.

STATIRA, OLYMPIA.

STATIRA.

By your means, daughter, I the barrier break
That keeps me distant from all human kind;
Again I enter this degenerate world
My husband to avenge, and break thy chains.
New strength the gods will to a mother give,
And soon thou shalt be set at liberty.
Help me to keep my word, by a new oath
Help me to wipe away the former's guilt.

OLYMPIA.

Alas!

STATIRA.

You groan!

OLYMPIA.

Must then this fatal day
Twice light up Hymen's inauspicious torch?

STATIRA.

What dost thou say?

OLYMPIA.

—Permit me, this first time,
My thoughts to utter with a trembling voice.
So much I love thee, mother, I would shed
The blood which from thee I derive, if so
The gods would, by new added years, protract
Thy life, or render it completely blessed.

STATIRA.

Dearest Olympia!

OLYMPIA.

Shall I tell those gods
I ask no throne except this calm retreat?
In it you'll see me lead my life resigned
And look with scorn on crowns forgot by you.
Thinkest thou my father, in the silent tomb,
Desires his foe should perish by our hands?
Amidst the horrors of the fight, let kings
Destroy each other, and avenge his death:
But we, the victims of so many ills,
Shall we, with feeble hands, assist their rage?
Shall we a fruitless murder undertake?
Tears are our portion, crimes for them were made.

STATIRA.

Our portion tears! For whom thus dost thou weep?
Is Alexander's daughter by the gods
Restored me? Heavens, is it her whose voice I hear!

OLYMPIA.

Mother!

STATIRA.

Ye angry gods!

OLYMPIA.

Cassander! . . .

STATIRA.

Explain yourself, my soul is shocked to hear you.

OLYMPIA.

I cannot speak———

STATIRA.

———You wound me to the heart.
End this anxiety, I charge thee, speak.

OLYMPIA.

Madam, too well I see I give you pain,
But whom I love I never will deceive.
Although forever I am resolved to shun
My guilty husband, I must love him still.

STATIRA.

Oh words accursed! ah, daughter since you love
This cruel husband, you will never fly him.
Thus Alexander you betray and me!
Ye gods, I saw my sire and husband die:
My daughter from me torn, your cruel will
Restores to make me perish by her fault.

OLYMPIA.

Thus prostrate falling———

STATIRA.

———Daughter ever dear,
But cruel and unnatural———

OLYMPIA.

Alas!
Oppressed with woe I bathe your knees with tears.
Mother forgive me.———

STATIRA.

———So I will and die.

OLYMPIA.

Be calm and hear me———

STATIRA.

———What have you to say?

OLYMPIA.

I swear by heaven, by my own name, by you,
By nature, I the punishment will bear
Of my own guilt. This hand to-day should shed
My blood ere I'd consent to be his wife.
You know my heart, I've told you that I love;
By this confession and my weakness judge
If my heart's yours, if love for you prevails
Over that love which has subdued my senses.
Consider not my sex or tender age,
Courage from my great parents I derive.
I might offend them, I cannot betray;
You'll know Olympia, when you see her die.

STATIRA.

Dear, but inhuman daughter, can you die,
And yet not hate the assassin of your sire!

OLYMPIA.

Tear out my heart, examine it, you'll find,
Though dear, my husband reigned not there like you.
The blood which animates it then you'll know;
Your daughter sacrifice.———

STATIRA.

———I know your heart.
I pity you, my child, and don't condemn.

Your courage and your duty give me hope,
I pity even the love that injures me.
You tear my heart, yet you affect it too.
Console your mother whilst you cause her death.
Alas! I am wretched, but you're not to blame.

OLYMPIA.

Which bears, oh heavens, of woe the greatest weight!
Which has most reason, to complain, of fate!

End of the third ACT.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

ANTIGONES, HERMAS.

[*In the porch.*

HERMAS.

You warned me well; the holy place profaned,
Will soon of strife and slaughter be the scene.
Your soldiers guard our passage near the shrine,
Cassander mad with love, with grief, and rage,
Daring the gods whom he before invoked,
Advances towards you by another path.
The signal's given, but in this enterprise
The people doubt whose cause they should espouse.
[*Going out.*

ANTIGONES.

I'll soon unite them.

SCENE II.

ANTIGONES, HERMAS, CASSANDER, SOSTHENES.

CASSANDER.

[*Stopping Antigones.*

———Stay unworthy friend,
False ally, and detested enemy,
How durst thou claim what heaven bestows on me?

ANTIGONES.

I do—should that in thee excite surprise?
The conqueror's daughter has sufficient right
To make the sons of Asia rise in arms,
And haughty tyrants tremble on their thrones.
Her portion's Babylon, but she may claim
The empire's wide extent in right of birth.
I, to possess them both, aspire, and know
Thy tears, thy expiations and thy grief,
The piercing eyes of nations cannot blind.
Think not Olympia's love still prone to doubt,
If thou art guilty of her father's death.
In her opinion you are now condemned.
Your heart, enslaved and tyrannized by love,
Seduced Olympia, and you hid her birth.
You thought to bury in oblivion's night
The fatal secret which to me is known.
Her love you owe to baseness and deceit.
But time at length her eyes has opened, and now
Cassander his pretensions must forego.
What, were thy hopes presumptuous? Didst thou think
By her right, to become the king of kings? . . .
By arms I may defend Statira's cause,

But would you our alliance still preserve?
In your new kingdom would you reign in peace,
Regain my friendship, on my arm depend?

CASSANDER.

Proceed.——

ANTIGONES.

Olympia yield, and we are friends:
For you I'll spill my blood; if you refuse
I'll henceforth be the greatest of your foes.
Maturely weigh your interests, and choose.

CASSANDER.

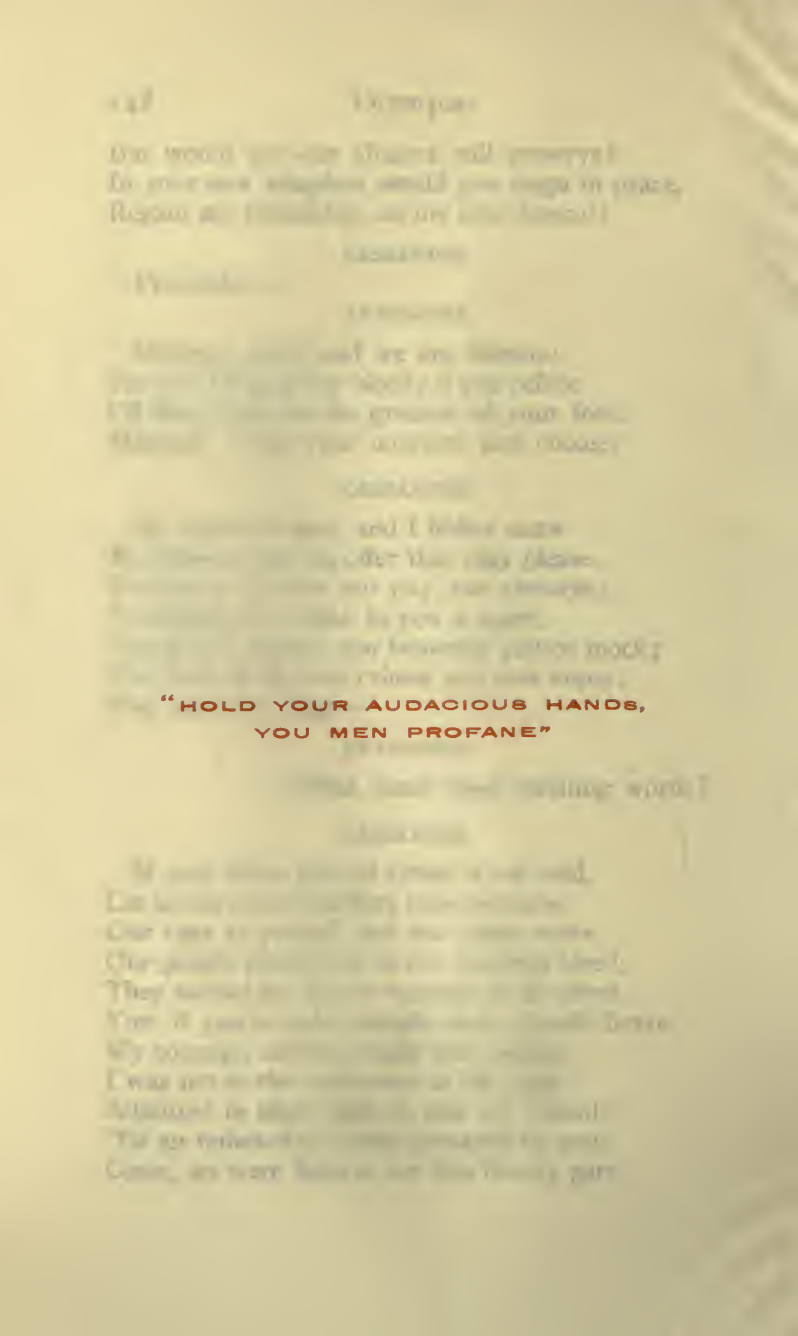
My choice is easy, and I hither came
To make to you an offer that may please.
You know nor law nor pity, nor remorse;
Friendship to violate, to you is sport.
The gods I feared, you heavenly justice mock;
The fruit of all your crimes you now enjoy;
You shall not long.—

ANTIGONES.

—What mean these swelling words?

CASSANDER.

If your fierce soul of virtue is not void,
Let us not to our soldiers have recourse
Our rage to second, and our anger serve.
Our people should not in our quarrels bleed,
They should not in our contests be involved.
You, if you're bold enough, alone should brave
My courage, and my single arm oppose:
I was not to the commerce of the gods
Admitted in their sight to slay my friend;
'Tis an unheard-of crime prepared by you:
Come, we were born to act this bloody part.


"HOLD YOUR AUDACIOUS HANDS,
YOU MEN PROFANE"

Guy

Come on, decide both of my fate and yours,
Pour out your blood, or glut yourself with mine.

ANTIGONES.

With joy the combat I accept; be sure
Olympia weds the man by whom thou art slain.

[*They draw.*

SCENE III.

The Hierophants come precipitately from the temple with the priests and the initiated, who, with a multitude of the populace, part Cassander and Antigones, and disarm them.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Hold your audacious hands, you men profane!
Respect our god, respect his sacred rites!
Haste, priests and people, part these barbarous men:
Banish fierce discord from this sacred shrine.
Your crimes atone—swords quickly disappear—
Ye gods grant pardon—monarchs heaven obey.

CASSANDER.

To you and heaven I yield.——

ANTIGONES.

——I still persist,
I call to witness Alexander's shade,
I call to witness the avenging gods,
That whilst I live, Olympia, my beloved,
Ne'er shall be folded in my rival's arms.
The impious match on Ephesus would bring
Shame, and make Asia's sons with horror shrink.

CASSANDER.

It would, no doubt, had it been made by you.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

With spirit calmer, and with heart less fierce,
Yield to the law obedience and respect.
All men it binds, by all should be fulfilled.
The poor man's hut, the haughty monarch's throne,
Alike subjected hear the voice of law;
The weak she aids, transgressors she restrains,
And her power sets the blameless victim free.
Whene'er a husband of whatever rank
Has chanced the parents of his wife to slay,
Though he be by our mysteries purified,
By Vesta's fire, and by her healthful stream,
And by repentance more essential still,
His wife that day may new engagements form.
She may, without offence, except she choose
To imitate the gods and pardon him.
As still Statira lives, you well may think
That she will of her daughter's fate dispose.
A mother's woes, a mother's rights respect;
The law of nations, and the character
Which nature gives, and nothing can efface.
Her voice august Olympia must obey.
All your attempts are vain since you must wait,
The widow's and her daughter's final will.

[*Exit with his followers.*

ANTIGONES.

I to these terms subscribe, she's surely mine.

[*Exit Antigones with Hermas.*

SCENE IV.

CASSANDER, SOSTHENES.

[*In the porch.*

CASSANDER.

You shall not find her treacherous, cruel man.
Let us remove her from this fatal shrine,
And disappoint this daring villain's hopes,
He laughs at my remorse, insults my grief,
And would with calm serenity and joy
Concealed, destroy my peace and tear my heart.

SOSTHENES.

Statira he seduces, sir, the deed
He justifies by laws he violates,
And by the gods his impious soul contemns.

CASSANDER.

Let's take her from the gods whom I have served,
Those cruel gods by whom I am betrayed.
I'd gladly die, the thunderer's stroke I'd bless;
But that my wife should in this fatal day
Pass from Cassander's to his rival's hand:
Ere that I bear, this temple shall be laid
In ashes, oh ye gods, you pardoned me!
My soul grown calm with blessed tranquillity,
Gave itself up to that delusive hope;
Ye gods, you snatch Olympia from my arms,
Thus do you pardon expiated crimes?

SOSTHENES.

You have not lost the fair; her tender heart
To you obedient and devoted still

Cannot so soon the man she loved forget;
Changes so quick are to the heart unknown.
By loving you she breaks not nature's law;
The wounds which you in fight at random dealt
Have, I will grant you, shed most precious blood!
The gods permitted that calamity.
You are not guilty of her father's death.
Your tears have for her mother's blood atoned;
Her woes are past, your favors present still.

CASSANDER.

The anguish of my soul you sooth in vain:
Statira's blood and Alexander's ghost
Cry from the ground and fill my soul with dread
She is their daughter, and may justly hate
Her hapless husband with relentless rage;
Olympia hates me, she whom I prefer
To Cyrus' throne, to all the thrones on earth.
Those expiations, secret mysteries
By kings neglected, sought with care by me,
She was their object, and my guilty soul
Approached the gods her presence to enjoy.

SOSTHENES.

[*Seeing Olympia.*

Alas! behold her to her griefs a prey,
She clasps the altar, bathes it with her tears.

CASSANDER.

'Tis time to take her from this shrine by force;
Go, lose no time, but everything prepare.

[*Exit Sosthenes.*

CASSANDER, OLYMPIA.

OLYMPIA.

[*Reclined upon the altar without seeing Cassander.*

How my heart rises in my throbbing breast!

How in despair 'tis plunged! how self-condemned!
[*Seeing Cassander.*
What do I see?——

CASSANDER.

Your husband plunged in woe.

OLYMPIA.

Cassander, to that name no more pretend,
That you should be my husband's not in fate.

CASSANDER.

I own myself unworthy of such bliss.
I know the crimes which cruel destiny
For both our ruin made my hand commit.
Thinking to expiate I've their measure filled.
My presence hurts you and my love insults.
Howe'er, vouchsafe to answer: has my aid
From war and from destruction saved your youth?

OLYMPIA.

Why did you save it?——

CASSANDER.

Even in infancy
Was not your innocence by me revered?
Did I not idolize you?——

OLYMPIA.

That's my grief.

CASSANDER.

After acknowledging the purest flame,
Free in your choice and mistress of yourself,
Did you not in the presence of the gods
Before this shrine receive my solemn vows?

OLYMPIA.

It is too true. May pitying Heaven avert
The punishment I have thereby incurred

CASSANDER.

I had your heart, Olympia.—

OLYMPIA.

Do not add
To my distress by such a keen reproach.
My youth 'twas easy for you to seduce;
My ignorance and weakness you deceived:
Your guilt's by this enhanced, fly hence. To hear
Your conversation is in me a crime.

CASSANDER.

Beware how you a greater crime commit
In listening to a treacherous villain's vows.
If for Antigones——

OLYMPIA.

Cease, wretched man,
My soul rejects his vows as well as yours.
Since I was once deluded and this hand
Was joined to thine stained with my parents' blood,
No mortal to my heart shall e'er lay claim:
Marriage, the world, and life alike I hate.
Since now my soul is mistress of her choice,
I without hesitation choose these tombs
Which hide my mother, for my last retreat;
I this asylum choose whose God alone
My heart by thee deceived shall now possess.
These altars I embrace, all thrones detest,
All Asia's thrones, but far above the rest
That which by proud Antigones is filled.
See me no more, go, let me mourn alone
That promised love which now I must abhor.

CASSANDER.

If then your heart my rival's love rejects,
You can't deprive me of a ray of hope;
And when your virtue a new husband shuns,
I think a favor is conferred on me.
Although I with your parents' blood am stained,
My soul, my being must depend on you;
Wife ever dear, whose virtues turned aside
The thunders aimed at my devoted head,
Still o'er my soul maintained a sovereign sway
And should your mother's rigor have disarmed.

OLYMPIA.

My mother! can your tongue pronounce her name!
Ah, if repentance, pity or soft love
Have any influence upon your heart,
Fly from the places she inhabits, fly
The altars I embrace.——

CASSANDER.

No, without you
I cannot go, you must my steps attend.
[*He takes her by the hand.*
Come, dearest wife.——

OLYMPIA.

[*Pulling back her hand.*
Then like my mother treat me,
This bosom, to its duty faithful, pierce:
A surer dagger plunge in this sad heart,
To shed my blood that cruel hand was formed.
Strike here.——

CASSANDER.

Your vengeance carries you too far.
My cruelty and violence were less.

Heaven pardons man, you how to punish know:
But your ingratitude exceeds all bounds
When thus a benefactor feels your hate.

OLYMPIA.

Have you not by your deeds incurred my hate?
Cassander, had thy fierce, thy bloody hand,
Which with the murderous steel my mother gored,
Stabbed me alone and shed no other blood,
I could have pardoned thee and loved thee still.
Fly, cruel man, fate wills that we should part.

CASSANDER.

No, destiny itself can't separate
Our fates, did you Cassander more detest;
Had you even married me to pierce my heart,
You must my steps attend; 'tis fate's decree.
Let me still love you as a punishment:
I swear by you it never will have end:
Punish, detest your husband, don't forsake.

SCENE VI.

CASSANDER, OLYMPIA, SOSTHENES.

SOSTHENES.

Appear, or soon Antigones prevails:
The gate he blocks, your warriors he harangues,
Your friends assembled near the sacred shrine
He strives to gain, and their fidelity
Seems to be shaken by his daring words:
He on Olympia calls, and on her sire;
Tremble both for your love and for your life;
Come.———

CASSANDER.

Is it thus you sacrifice me then
To a detested rival? I in quest
Of death will go, since you my death desire.

OLYMPIA.

Alas! Olympia cannot wish thy death.
Live distant from her.——

CASSANDER.

Without thee the light
Of heaven is odious to my eyes, and life
An object full of horror; if I escape
Death's rage, I to this temple will return
And force thee hence, or with the vital drops
That warm my heart the sacred pavement stain.
[*Exit with Sosthenes.*

SCENE VII.

OLYMPIA. [*Alone.*

Ah, wretch! 'tis he that causes my alarms!
Wherefore, Cassander, should I weep for you?
Is it so hard our duty to perform?
The blood from whence I sprung shall o'er my mind
Rule with despotic sway. By nature's voice
I'll be directed, by her power I swear
To sacrifice my sentiments to you.
Far different oaths I at this altar made,
Gods, you received them, and your clemency
Approved the passion which inspired my soul.
My state your power has changed, then change my heart,

Give me a virtue suited to my woe.
Pity a soul by ruthless passion torn,
Which must its nature or its faith forego.
Whilst yet obscure, I lived in perfect bliss,
The world forgetting in captivity;
Both to my parents and myself unknown.
Ruin to my illustrious name I owe,
At least I'll strive to merit it. Cassander
I must forsake, must fly thee; can I hate?
How little power has woman o'er her heart!
Weeping, I tear the wound that rankles there,
And whilst my hand, with trembling, seeks the dart,
I plunge it deeper, make the wound more wide.

SCENE VIII.

OLYMPIA, THE HIEROPHANTS, *Attendants.*

OLYMPIA.

Pontiff, where go you? Oh! protect the weak:
You tremble, and your eyes with tears o'erflow.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

I grieve, unhappy Princess! at your lot.

OLYMPIA.

Since I am forlorn, afford me then thy aid.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

With resignation to their heavenly will
Expect protection from the gods alone.

OLYMPIA.

Alas! what words are these!——

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—O daughter dear!
The widow of great Alexander.——

OLYMPIA.

——Gods!
Has aught befallen my mother? quickly speak.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

All's lost, both kings roused up to furious rage,
Trampling on law, and armed against the gods,
Within this temple's consecrated porch,
Their troops spurred on to murder and to rage.
Blood flowed on every side, with sword in hand,
To you Cassander cut himself a path.
I marched against him, having no defence
But laws neglected and offended gods.
Your mother in despair his fury met—
She thought him master of the shrine and you.
Tired of such horrors, tired of such black deeds,
She seized the knife with which we victims slay,
And plunged it in those loins wherein you found
The source of life and of calamity.

OLYMPIA.

I die! Support me—is she yet alive?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Cassander's with her, he laments her fate,
And even presumes to offer her relief,
To second those whose virtuous hands assist her.
He raves, himself he blames, throws down his arms,
Her feet embraces, bathes them with his tears.
Hearing his cries, her dying eyes she opes,
And looks upon him as a monster fierce
Come to deprive her of life's poor remains,

By the same hand which she had escaped before;
She makes an effort weak to raise herself,
Then falls again and gasps for her last breath;
Cassander and the light she hates alike,
Then opening with regret her half-closed eyes,
Go, says she to me, hapless minister
Of a sad shrine profaned with human gore,
Console Olympia, she her mother loves,
Tell her it is my pleasure that she wed
Antigones, he will avenge my death.

OLYMPIA.

I'll go and near her die; now hear me gods,
Accompany my steps and close my eyes.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Intrepid courage to your ills oppose.

OLYMPIA.

Perhaps I soon may show to proud mankind,
That courage may inspire the female mind.

ACT V. SCENE I.

ANTIGONES, HERMAS.

HERMAS. [*In the porch.*

Vengeance is vain, compassion now should speak,
A hapless rival is not worth your hate.
Fly from this dire abode; Olympia, sir,
Is lost both to Cassander and yourself.

ANTIGONES.

Is then Statira dead?———

HERMAS.

———Cassander's fate
Has made him fatal to the conqueror's race.
Statira sinking with a load of woe,
Expires with horror in her daughter's arms.
Tender Olympia stretched upon the corpse,
Seems scarcely to retain the breath of life.
The priests and priestesses dissolved in tears,
Increase their griefs by mixing them with hers.
With cries and groans the temple's vaults resound,
A funeral pile's prepared, and all the pomp
With which man's vanity adorns the dead.
'Tis said Olympia in this solitude
Will dwell where once her mother lived retired;
And that renouncing marriage and the world,
She'll dedicate to heaven her future life,
And that she'll in eternal silence weep
Her family, her mother, and her birth.

ANTIGONES.

No, no, her duty's law she must obey,
My right to her admits of no dispute.
Statira gives her to me, and her will
When at the point of death's a law divine.
Frantic Cassander and his fatal love
Statira's daughter must with horror fill.

HERMAS.

Sir, can you think it?

ANTIGONES.

She herself declares
That her sad heart disclaims this barbarous man,
Should he persist in his audacious love,
He shall with life for his presumption pay.

HERMAS.

Would you mix blood with tears, and with the flames
Of the sad pile where burns the royal corpse?
Your awe-struck soldiers will with horror start
From such an object, they'll not follow you.

ANTIGONES.

No, I will not disturb the funeral rites;
This I have sworn; Cassander will revere them,
Awhile Olympia shall my rage suspend,
But when the funeral's o'er I'll give it scope.
[*The temple opens.*

SCENE II.

ANTIGONES, HERMAS, THE HIEROPHANTS, THE PRIESTS.

[*Advancing slowly*] OLYMPIA [*in mourning, and supported by the priestesses.*]

HERMAS.

Olympia scarce alive, is this way led.
I see the pontiff of the sacred shrine,
Who following bathes her tracks with floods of tears.
The priestesses support her in their arms.

ANTIGONES.

I own these objects in the hardest heart
Would raise emotion. Madam, give me leave
[*To Olympia*
To mix with yours my sorrows, and to swear
That I'll avenge the wrongs you have sustained.
The wretch by whom you twice a mother lost,

A hope presumptuous madly entertains,
But know his punishment is not far off.
To your afflictions add not trembling fear:
But all his rash attempts defy secure.

OLYMPIA.

Ah! speak not now of vengeance and of blood,
Statira's dead, I'm dead to human kind.

ANTIGONES.

Her loss I mourn, and I pity you,
Her sacred will I justly might allege,
Dear to my hopes, and by yourself revered;
But I know what is in this juncture due,
Both to her shade, her daughter, and your grief.
Madam, consult yourself, her will obey.
[*Exit with Hermas.*

SCENE III.

OLYMPIA, THE HIEROPHANTS, PRIESTS, PRIESTESSES.

OLYMPIA.

You who alone compassionate my woes,
Priest of a God of mildness and of peace,
Can I not forever dedicate my woe
To this sad shrine bathed with my mother's tears?
Sure, sir, you cannot have so hard a heart
To shut this place of refuge from my grief?
'Tis all that's claimed by one of royal race,
Do not refuse this poor inheritance.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

I mourn your fate, but how can I assist you?
Your mother dying has your husband named.

You yourself heard her her last will declare,
Whilst with our hands we closed her dying eyes.
And if you will not her commands obey,
Cassander still may claim you as his right.

OLYMPIA.

'Tis true, I to my dying mother swore
Ne'er to receive Cassander's bloody hand,
My oath I'll keep.———

THE HIEROPHANTS.

——You freedom still enjoy,
The gods alone can of your hand dispose.
Things soon will change; you now, Olympia, may
Determine and dispose your future life.
Indeed it fits not that the self-same day
Should light the funeral pile and hymen's torch.
Such marriage would be shocking, but a word
Suffices, and that word I want to hear.
In this extremity your heart should know
What to your royal race is justly due.

OLYMPIA.

Sir, I have told you any nuptial tie
Is hateful to my heart, and should be to yours.
A mother's injured shade I'll not betray:
A husband I forsake, that should suffice.
Both from the throne and marriage let me fly.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

Antigones or else Cassander choose.
Those armed rivals, jealous as they're proud,
Are forced by your decision to abide.
You with a word confusion may prevent,
And slaughter which would quickly rage again;
Were not men filled with reverence and respect

By all that funeral pomp, that pile, those altars,
Those duties, and those honors which awhile
To serious contemplation souls dispose.
Piety lasts not long amongst the great;
Their rage I hardly could awhile suspend;
To-morrow blood will Ephesus o'erflow.
Princess, decide, and all will be appeased:
The people ever to the law adhere.
When you have spoken they'll support your choice;
If not, with sword in hand within this shrine,
Cassander will your plighted faith require;
What he possessed he has a right to claim,
Though with just horror he inspires your soul.

OLYMPIA.

Enough, your apprehensions I conceive,
My soul shall never to complaint give way:
To fate I yield, you all its rigor know. . . . .
My choice already in my heart is made:
I have resolved.—

THE HIEROPHANTS.

—Then shall Antigones
Be happy, and your plighted faith receive?

OLYMPIA.

Howe'er that be, this juncture, Sir, ill suits
With such engagements; you yourself must own
The fatal day on which a mother died,
Should quite engross a daughter's every thought. . .
Must you not bear her to the funeral pile?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

'Tis ours that mournful duty to perform:
All that remains of her an urn shall hold;
Her ashes to deposit be your care.

OLYMPIA.

Alas! her guilty daughter caused her death,
Something that daughter owes her injured shade.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

All things I'll now prepare.—

OLYMPIA.

—Say, do your laws
Permit me to behold her on the pile?
May I approach the funeral pomp, and shed
Tears on her body while the flames ascend?

THE HIEROPHANTS.

It is your duty, we partake your grief.
You've naught to dread, those armed rivals now
Will not presume your sorrows to disturb.
Present perfumes, your veils and locks of hair,
And a libation, offering sad, but pure.
[*The priestesses lay these offerings on the altar.*

OLYMPIA.

[*To the Hierophants.*

This is the only favor I require.
[*To the inferior priestess.*
You who attended her in this abode
Of death, and shared the horrors of her fate,
Return and give me notice when the fire
Is ready to consume those loved remains:
Since 'tis permitted, let my last farewell
Her manes satisfy.———

PRIESTESS.

I shall obey. [*Exit.*

OLYMPIA.

[*To the Hierophants.*

Go, holy priest, the sacred pile erect,
Prepare the wreaths of cypress and the urn:
Bid the two rivals to the pile repair,
I in their presence will explain myself
Before my mother's corpse, and in the sight
Of holy priestesses, who to my woes
And to my promises can witness bear,
My sentiments, my choice shall be declared;
You must approve them, though perhaps you'll grieve.

THE HIEROPHANTS.

You still are mistress of your destiny:
This day expired, your freedom will be o'er.

[*Exit with the priests.*

SCENE IV.

OLYMPIA.

[*At the front of the stage, the priestesses in a semi-circle at the bottom.*]

OLYMPIA.

Oh thou who to my shame dost still enslave
My heart, which has deliberately made choice;
Who o'er Statira dead dost triumph still,
O'er Alexander and their hapless race!
O'er earth and heaven against thee both conspired.
Reign, hapless lover, o'er my tortured sense:
If you still love me, which I scarce can wish,
Your fatal victory will cost you dear.

SCENE V.

OLYMPIA, CASSANDER, THE PRIESTESSES.

CASSANDER.

Your wishes to fulfil, I hither come;
This fatal pile shall with my blood be stained.
Accept my death; the only hope I've left
Is that your pity, not you vengeance, asks it.

OLYMPIA.

Cassander!

CASSANDER.

Dearest wife!

OLYMPIA.

Ah, cruel man!

CASSANDER.

No pardon for this criminal remains,
The hapless slave of cruel destiny;
To be a parricide was still my fate:
Still I am thy husband: Spite of all my crimes,
My soul Olympia idolizes still.
Although you hate me, Hymen's rites respect:
You have no tie on earth except to me:
'Tis death alone can separate our fates;
I must, in dying, see you and adore.
[*He throws himself at her feet.*
Wreak vengeance on my guilty head, my crimes
Severely punish, but forsake me not.
Hymen's more sacred are than nature's ties.

OLYMPIA.

Rise, rise, the funeral rites profane no more,
No more profane the ashes of the dead.
Whilst on the dreadful pile the flames consume
My mother's body, don't pollute the gifts
Which here I at the funeral pile present:
Do not approach, but at a distance hear me.

SCENE VI.

OLYMPIA, CASSANDER, ANTIGONES AND THE PRIESTESSES.

ANTIGONES.

Your virtue cannot still decline a choice:
Her will Statira at her death explained:
This day of terror filled my soul with awe,
And I the dead respected; else this arm,
This vengeful arm had plunged the shrine in blood;
And, in obedience to your orders, now
I come as to my rival's judge and mine:
From apprehensions free, pronounce our doom.
I hope you will a just distinction make
Between the man by whom your mother bled,
And him who strove her murder to avenge.
Nature has sacred rites; Statira, placed
By Alexander, looks on you from heaven.
Within this darksome shrine you're buried now,
But heaven and earth attentive mark your deeds:
Between us two Olympia must decide.

OLYMPIA.

I shall, but you must treat me with respect.
You see these preparations and these gifts,

Which to the infernal gods I must present;
And you, like furious rivals, choose this time,
Midst tombs, to talk of marriage and of love!
You soldiers of the potent king, my sire,
Who, by his death, are kings become yourselves,
If I am dear to you, I charge you swear
You'll not oppose my duties or my choice.

CASSANDER.

I swear it solemnly, and you shall find
That I respect you as I scorn that traitor.

ANTIGONES.

I swear it too, for sure I am, your heart
Must from my barbarous rival shocked recoil.
Declare yourself.———

OLYMPIA.

Think then what e'er befalls,
That Alexander's present, that he hears us.

ANTIGONES.

Decide before him.——

CASSANDER.

———I your pleasure wait.

OLYMPIA.

Then know the heart which thus you persecute,
And judge what resolution I should take.
Whatever choice I make, must fatal prove;
The grief that racks my soul too well you know,
Know likewise that I have deserved it all.
My parents I betrayed, who might have known
I caused the death of her who gave me birth:
I found a mother in this dire abode,
I quickly lost her, in these arms she died.

To her sad daughter, dying thus she spoke,
"Marry Antigones, I die content."
Then she was seized with agonies, and I
Her death to hasten, her desire opposed.

ANTIGONES.

Thus do you brave me and insult my love,
Your mother injure, nature's laws betray.

OLYMPIA.

Her shade I injure not, nor injure you;
I justice do to all and to myself. . . . .
Cassander, first to you my faith I gave:
Think you the gods our union could approve?
Decide this point yourself: you know your crimes,
I will not now reproach you with your guilt.
Repair it when you can.———

CASSANDER.

———I can't appease you!
I can't assuage the horror I inspire,
My heart you soon shall know: your promise keep.

[*The temple opens, and the pile is seen in flames.*

SCENE the Last.

OLYMPIA, CASSANDER, ANTIGONES, THE HIEROPHANTS, PRIESTS, PRIESTESSES.

THE INFERIOR PRIESTESS.

Princess, 'tis time.———

OLYMPIA.

[*To Cassander.*

Behold yon flaming pile.
Now mourn, Cassander, your unhappy fate.

THE ORPHAN OF CHINA

Vol. 15 12

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

GENGHIS KHAN, Emperor of the Tartars.
OCTAR, } Officers under Genghis Khan.
OSMAN, }
ZAMTI, a learned Mandarin.
IDAME, wife of Zamti.
ASSELI, friend to Idame.
ETAN, friend to Zamti.

SCENE a Mandarin's palace near the court, in the city of Cambalu, now called Pekin.

This piece was produced in Paris, 1755, when the author was in exile.

THE ORPHAN OF CHINA.

TO THE MOST NOBLE DUKE OF RICHELIEU, MARSHAL AND PEER OF FRANCE, FIRST GENTLEMAN OF THE CHAMBER TO HIS MAJESTY, GOVERNOR OF LANGUEDOC, AND MEMBER OF THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

My Lord, I would have presented you with a piece of fine marble; but, instead of it, can only offer you a few Chinese figures. This little performance is not indeed worthy of your acceptance; there is no hero in this piece, who has united all parties in his favor, and rendered himself universally agreeable, by the force of superior talents, or supported a falling kingdom, or made the noble attempt to overthrow an English colony with four cannons only. I know better than anybody else the insignificance of my own works; but everything may be forgiven to an attachment of forty years' standing. The world, indeed, will say, that, retired as I am to the foot of the Alps, covered with eternal snows, and where I ought to be nothing but a philosopher, I had still vanity enough to let it be known, that France's brightest ornament on the banks of the Seine has not forgotten me. I have consulted my own heart alone, which has always guided me, inspired every word, and directed every action. You know it has sometimes deceived me; but not after such long and convincing proofs. If this tragedy should survive its author, permit it to inform posterity, that he who wrote it was honored with your friendship; that your uncle laid the foundation of the fine arts in France, and that you supported them in their decline.

I took the first hint of this tragedy some time since

from reading the "Orphan of Tchao," a Chinese tragedy, translated by Father Bremare, an account of which is given in Du Halde's history. This piece was written in the fourteenth century, and under the dynasty of Genghis Khan; an additional proof, that the Tartar conquerors did not change the manners of the conquered nation; on the other hand, they protected and encouraged all the arts established in China, and adopted their laws: an extraordinary instance of the natural superiority which reason and genius have over blind force and barbarism. Twice have the Tartars acted in this manner; for when they had once more subdued this great empire, the beginning of last century, they submitted a second time to the wisdom of the conquered, and the two nations formed but one people, governed by the most ancient laws in the world; a most remarkable event, the illustration of which was the principal end of this performance.

The Chinese tragedy, which they call "The Orphan," was taken out of an immense collection of the theatrical performances of that nation, which has cultivated this art for about three thousand years before it was invented by the Greeks, the art of making living portraits of the actions of men, establishing schools of morality, and teaching virtue in dialogue and representation. For a long time dramatic poetry was held in esteem only in that vast country of China, separated from and unknown to the rest of the world, and in the city of Athens. Rome was unacquainted with it till above four hundred years afterwards. If you look for it among the Persians, or Indians, who pass for an inventive people, you will not find it there; it has never yet reached them. Asia was contented with the fables

of Palpay and Lokman, which contain all their morality, and have instructed by their allegories every age and nation.

One would have imagined, that from making animals speak, there was but one step to make men speak also, to introduce them on the stage, and to form the dramatic art; and yet this ingenious people never thought of it: from whence we may infer, that the Chinese, Greeks, and Romans are the only ancient nations, who were acquainted with the true spirit of society. Nothing indeed renders men more sociable, polishes their manners, or improves their reason more than the assembling them together for the mutual enjoyment of intellectual pleasure. Scarce had Peter the Great polished Russia before theatres were established there. The more Germany improves, the more of our dramatic representations has it adopted. Those few places where they were not received in the last age are never ranked amongst the civilized countries.

The "Orphan of Tchao" is a valuable monument of antiquity, and gives us more insight into the manners of China than all the histories which ever were, or ever will be written of that vast empire. 'Tis true, indeed, it is extremely barbarous, when compared with the excellent performances of our times; but, notwithstanding, is a masterpiece, when placed in competition with the pieces written by our authors in the fourteenth century. Our "Troubadours," "Bazoche," the company of "Children Without Care," and "The Foolish Mother," all of them fall short of the Chinese author. It is remarkable also, that this piece is written in the language of the Mandarins, which has never changed, whilst we can scarce understand the language that was spoken in the time of Louis XII. and Charles VIII.

One can only compare the "Orphan of Tchao" to the English and Spanish tragedies of the sixteenth century, which still please beyond sea, and on the other side of the Pyrenees. The action lasts five and twenty years, as in some of the monstrous farces of Shakespeare and Lope de Vega, which are called tragedies, though they are nothing but a heap of incredible stories. The enemy of the house of Tchao wants to destroy the head of it; and for that purpose lets loose on him a great dog, whom he imagines endowed with the power of discovering guilt by instinct, as James Aimar amongst us was said to have found out thieves by his wand: at last he forges an order from the emperor, and sends his enemy Tchao a rope, a dagger, and some poison. Tchao sings, according to the custom of his country, and very deliberately cuts his own throat, in consequence of that obedience, which every man owes to the divine right of the emperor of China. The persecutor puts to death three hundred persons of the family of Tchao. The prince's widow is brought to bed of the orphan. The infant is saved from the rage of the tyrant, who had exterminated the whole family, and would have destroyed the only remaining branch of it: the tyrant orders all the children in all the towns round about to be destroyed, in hopes that the orphan might perish amongst the rest in the general slaughter.

We fancy we are reading the *Arabian Night's Entertainment* put into scenes; and yet, in spite of all these marvellous and improbable things, it is extremely interesting: though there is such a multiplicity of events, all is clear and simple; a merit which must recommend it to every age and nation, and which is greatly wanting in our modern per-

formances. The Chinese piece is indeed very deficient with regard to all other beauties: there is no unity of time or action, no picture of the manners; no sentiment, eloquence, reason or passion in it; and yet, as I said before, the work is superior to anything we could produce in former ages.

How comes it to pass, that the Chinese, who in the fourteenth century, and a long time before, could boast of better dramatic performances than any European nation, still remain, as it were, in the infancy of this art, while we, in process of time, and by dint of pains and assiduity, have been able to produce about a dozen pieces, which, if they are not absolutely perfect, are at least much above anything the rest of the world could ever pretend to of this kind. The Chinese, as well as the rest of the Asiatics, have stopped at the first elements of poetry, eloquence, natural philosophy, astronomy, and painting; all practised by them so long before they were known to us. They began in everything much sooner than us, but made no progress afterwards; like the ancient Egyptians, who first taught the Greeks, and became at last so ignorant, as not even to be capable of receiving instruction from them.

These people, whom we take so much pains and go so far to visit; from whom, with the utmost difficulty, we have obtained permission to carry the riches of Europe, and to instruct them, do not to this day know how much we are their superiors; they are not even far enough advanced in knowledge to venture to imitate us, and don't so much as know whether we have any history or not.

The celebrated Metastasio has made choice of pretty nearly the same subject as myself for one of his dramatic poems, an orphan escaped from the

destruction of his family, and has drawn his plot from a dynasty nine hundred years before our era.

The Chinese tragedy of the "Orphan of Tchao" differs in many respects; and I have chosen one that is not much like either of them, except in the name, as I have confined my plan to the grand epoch of Genghis Khan. I have endeavored to describe the manners of the Tartars and Chinese: the most interesting events are nothing when they do not paint the manners; and this painting, which is one of the greatest secrets of the art, is no more than an idle amusement, when it does not tend to inspire notions of honor and virtue.

I will venture to say, that from the *"Henriade"* to the publication of *"Zaïre,"* and this tragedy, be it good or bad, such is the principle by which I have always been governed; and that in my history of the age of Louis XIV., I have celebrated both my king and country, without flattery to either. In labors of this kind I have spent above forty years of my life. But observe the following words of a Chinese author, translated into Spanish by the famous Navarrete.

"When you compose any work, show it only to your friends; dread the public, and your brother writers; for they will play false with you, abuse everything you do, and impute to you what you never did: calumny with her hundred trumpets, will sound them all to your destruction; whilst truth, who is dumb, shall remain with you. The celebrated Ming was accused of hating Tien and Li, and the Emperor Vang: when the old man died, they found amongst his papers a panegyric on Vang, a hymn to Tien, another to Li, etc."

VOLTAIRE.

THE ORPHAN OF CHINA.

ACT I. SCENE I.

IDAME, ASSELI.

IDAME.

O Asseli, amidst this scene of horror,
Whilst desolation rages through the land,
And the proud Tartar threatens instant ruin
To this devoted palace, must thy friend
Experience new calamities?

ASSELI.

Alas!
We all partake the general ruin; all
Must with the public sorrows mix our own:
Who doth not tremble for a father's life,
A husband's, son's, or brother's? even within
These sacred walls, where dwells the holy band,
The ministers of heaven, the interpreters
Of China's laws, with helpless infancy,
And feeble age; even here we are not safe:
Who knows how far the cruel conqueror
May urge his triumphs, whilst the thunder breaks
On every side, and soon may burst upon us?

IDAME.

Who is this great destroyer, this dire scourge
Of Catai's sinking empire?

ASSELI.

He is called
The king of kings, the fiery Genghis Khan,
Who lays the fertile fields of Asia waste,
And makes it but a monument of ruin:
Already Octar, his successful chief,
Has stormed the palace; this once powerful empire,
The mistress of the world, is bathed in blood!

IDAME.

Knowest thou, my friend, that this destructive tyrant,
Whom now we tremble at, who proudly thus
Treads on the necks of kings, is yet no more
Than a wild Scythian soldier; bred to arms
And practised in the trade of blood; who long
Had wandered o'er the neighboring deserts, there
Formed a rude band of lawless rioters,
And fought his way to glory; now successful,
And now oppressed, at length by fortune led
Hither he came for refuge: Asseli,
I think thou must remember him, his name
Was Temugin.

ASSELI.

Ha! he who once addressed
His vows to thee! thy angry father then
Rejected him with scorn; though now his name
Is grown so terrible.

IDAME.

It is the same:
Methought even then I saw the rising dawn
Of future glory: I remember well,
Even when he came a beggar to the palace,
And craved protection, he behaved like one

Born to command: he loved me; and I own
My foolish heart had well nigh listened to him:
Perhaps it soothed the woman's vanity
To hold this lion in my toils; perhaps
I hoped in time to soften his rude soul,
And bend his savage fierceness to the ways
Of social life: he might have served the state
Which now he would destroy: our proud refusal
Incensed the hero, fatal may it prove
To this unhappy kingdom: well thou knowest
Our pride and jealousy: the ancient laws
Of this imperial city; our religion,
Our interest and our glory, all forbid
Alliance with the nations: for myself,
The noble Zamti merited my love,
And heaven hath joined me to him by the ties
Of holy marriage: who would e'er have thought
This poor despised abandoned Scythian thus
Should triumph over us? I refused his hand;
I am a wife and mother; how that thought
Alarms me! he is fiery and revengeful;
A Scythian never pardons: cruel fate!
And will this valiant nation tamely yield
Its neck to slavery, and be led like sheep
To slaughter?

ASSELI.

'Tis reported the Koreans
Have raised an army, but we know not yet
If it be true.

IDAME.

This sad uncertainty
But doubles our distress: heaven only knows
What we must suffer, if the emperor
Has found a place of refuge, if the queen

Is fallen beneath the tyrant's power, if yet
They live; alas! the last surviving pledge
Of their unhappy nuptials, the dear infant
Entrusted to our care! I tremble for him.
Perhaps my Zamti's sacred character
And holy office may subdue the hearts
Of these proud conquerors; savage as they are,
And thirsting for the blood of half mankind,
They yet believe there is a power above
That rules o'er all; nature in every breast
Hath wisely stamped the image of its God:
I talk of hope, but have a thousand fears
That wring my heart.

SCENE II.

IDAME, ZAMTI, ASSELI.

ASSELI.

O my unhappy lord,
Speak, what must be our fate? is it determined?
What hast thou seen?

ZAMTI.

I tremble to repeat it:
We are undone: our empire is no more;
A prey to robbers: what hath it availed us
That we have trod in the fair paths of virtue?
Long time secure within the arms of peace
We shone illustrious in the rolls of time,
And gave a bright example to mankind:
From us the world received its laws; but vain
Is human worth when lawless power prevails:
I saw the northern hive rush in upon us,

And force their passage through a sea of blood;
Where'er they passed they spread destruction round them:
At length they seized the palace, where the best
Of sovereigns and of men, with calm composure
And resignation yielded to his fate:
The wretched queen lay fainting in his arms:
Those of their numerous sons, whom lusty manhood
Had sent to battle, were already slain:
The rest, who naught could give him but their tears,
Hung at his knees and wept; by secret paths
I found an entrance to the palace; there
Did I behold the cruel tyrants bind
In ignominious chains the conquered king,
His children, and his wife.

IDAME.

Unhappy monarch!
O what a change is this! relentless heaven!

ZAMTI.

The wretched captive turned his eyes towards me,
And in the sacred language, to the Tartar
And to the multitude unknown, cried out,
"Preserve my last and only hope—my son."
From my full heart I promised, swore to act
As he directed me, then fled to thee.
Whether the tyrants, busied in their search
Of plunder, thought not of me, or the symbol
Which here I wear of the divinity
Struck their rude souls with reverential awe,
Or whether heaven in kind compassion meant
To save my precious charge, and cast a cloud
O'er their deluded eyes, I know not what
Drew their attention, but they let me pass.

IDAME.

We yet may save him, he shall go with me,
And with my son; old Etan shall conduct us:
In some lone wood, or solitary cave,
We may conceal him till the search is past:
Thank heaven they have not reached us yet.

ZAMTI.

Alas!
No place is sacred, no asylum's left
For the dear royal infant: I expect
The brave Koreans, but they'll come too late:
But let us seize the favorable hour,
And lodge our precious pledge in safety.

SCENE III.

ZAMTI, IDAME, ASSELI, ETAN.

ZAMTI.

Etan,
Thou seemest disordered; what's the news?

IDAME.

My lord,
We must away; the Scythian has prevailed,
And all is lost.

ETAN.

You are observed, and flight
Is now impossible: a guard is placed
Around us: all obey the conqueror,
And tremble at his power: the emperor's loss
Fills every heart with terror.

ZAMTI.

Is he dead?

IDAME.

O heaven!

ETAN.

It was indeed a dreadful sight:
Himself, his queen, his children, butchered all;
A race divine, respected, loved, adored;
Their headless trunks exposed to the derision
Of their proud conqueror, whilst their trembling subjects
Submissive bend beneath the yoke, nor dare
To shed a tear o'er those whom long they loved.
At length our haughty lord, grown tired of conquest,
And satiated with blood, proclaimed to all
The terms of life, eternal slavery.
This northern tyrant, whom the wrath of heaven
Hath sent for our destruction, once contemned
And spurned at by our court, returns to glut
His vengeance on us: these wild sons of rapine,
Who live in tents, in chariots, and in fields,
Will never brook confinement 'midst the walls
Of this close city: they detest our arts,
Our customs, and our laws; and therefore mean
To change them all; to make this splendid seat
Of empire one vast desert, like their own.

IDAME.

I know the conqueror comes to sate his vengeance
On this unhappy kingdom: whilst I lived
Unnoticed and obscure, I might have hope
Of safety; but that hope is now no more:
The night is past that hid me from the eye
Of persecution, and I must be wretched.
Thrice happy those, who to a tyrant master
Are still unknown.

ZAMTI.

Who knows but gracious heaven
May interpose and save the royal infant:
'Tis our first duty to preserve the charge
Committed to our care, and guard him well.
What comes this Tartar for?

IDAME.

O heaven! defend us,

SCENE IV.

OCTAR.

Hear, slaves; and let your answer be—obedience:
An infant yet remains, of royal race,
Amongst you: in the conqueror's name I here
Command you to deliver him—to me.
I shall expect him here: begone; delay
Were dangerous: bring him instantly, or know,
Destruction waits on all, but first on you.
The day's far spent; ere night he must be found:
Remember, and obey.

SCENE V.

ZAMTI, IDAME.

IDAME.

O dreadful message!
For what are we reserved? Alas! my lord,
Ne'er till this day of blood did crimes like this
Affright my soul: you answer not, but send
Your fruitless sighs to heaven. Sweet innocent,

Must we then give thee up a sacrifice
To brutal rage?

ZAMTI.

I've promised, sworn to save him.

IDAME.

What can thy oaths, thy promises avail?
Thou canst not keep them; every hope is lost.

ZAMTI.

And wouldst thou have me sacrifice the son
Of my loved sovereign?

IDAME.

O I cannot bear
To think of it; my eyes are bathed in tears.
O were I not a mother, would kind heaven
But grant me now to shorten my sad days,
Then would I say to Zamti, come, my lord,
We'll die together; all is lost to us,
And we will perish with our country.

ZAMTI.

Who
That sees the wretched fate of Cathay's kings
Would wish to live? what is this phantom death,
That thus appalls mankind? the wretch's hope,
The villain's terror, and the brave man's scorn:
Without reluctance, and without regret,
The wise expect and meet him as a friend.

IDAME.

What secret purpose labors in your breast?
Your cheek is pale, your eyes are filled with tears;
My sympathizing heart feels all your sorrows,
And would relieve them; what have you resolved?

ZAMTI.

To keep my oath; therefore away, and watch
The royal infant: I shall follow you.

IDAME.

Alas! a woman's tears can ne'er defend him.

SCENE VI.

ZAMTI, ETAN.

ZAMTI.

Vain is your care, your kind compassion vain,
For he must die; the nation's weal demands it.
Think rather how thou mayest preserve thy country.

ZAMTI.

Yes, I will make the dreadful sacrifice.
Etan, I know thou holdest this empire dear;
Yes, thou adorest the God of heaven and earth,
As worshipped by our ancestors; that God
Our bonzes know not, and our tyrants scorn.

ETAN.

In him I trust, on him alone rely
For my own comfort, and my country's safety.

ZAMTI.

Swear then by him, and his all-ruling power,
That thou wilt bury in eternal silence
The solemn secret that I mean to pour
Into thy faithful bosom: swear, thy hand
Shall still be ready to perform whate'er
Thy duty and thy God by me command.

ETAN.

I swear; and may the miseries that have fallen
On this unhappy kingdom light on me,
If ever I am false in word or deed!

ZAMTI.

I cannot now recede: then mark me, Etan.

ETAN.

Alas! thou weepest: amidst the general ruin
Can there be cause for added grief?

ZAMTI.

The doom
Is past, my friend, and cannot be reversed.

ETAN.

I know it cannot; but a stranger's son—

ZAMTI.

A stranger! he, my king!

ETAN.

When I remember
He is our emperor's child, I shudder at it:
What's to be done?

ZAMTI.

My path thou seest, is here
Prescribed, and every action noted down
By our new tyrants; thou mayest act with freedom,
Because unknown and unobserved: thou knowest
The orphan's place of refuge: for a time
We may conceal him 'midst the secret tombs
Of our great ancestors; then shelter him
Beneath Korea's chief; he will protect
The royal infant: leave the rest to me.

ETAN.

And how will you appear without him, how
Appease the conqueror?

ZAMTI.

I have wherewithal
To glut his vengeance.

ETAN.

You, my lord?

ZAMTI.

O nature!
O cruel duty!

ETAN.

How—

ZAMTI.

I have a son,
An only child, now in his cradle—go
And seize him.

ETAN.

Ha! your son!

ZAMTI.

To save—my king.
Away, and let him—but I can no more.

ETAN.

Alas! my lord, what a command is this!
I never can obey it.

ZAMTI.

Think on Zamti;
Think on his love, his weakness, his misfortunes,
Thy duty, and—thy oath.

ETAN.

'Twas rash and vain:
Thou didst extort it from me: I admire
Thy generous purpose; but if as a friend
I might be heard—

ZAMTI.

No more; I've heard too much
Already: what is all that thou couldst say
To what a father feels? When nature's silenced,
Friendship should urge no longer.

ETAN.

I obey.

ZAMTI.

Leave me for pity's sake.

SCENE VIII.

ZAMTI. [*Alone.*

Is nature silent?
O wretched father! still thou hearest that voice
So fatal and so dear: O drown it, heaven,
In sweet oblivion; do not let my wife
And her dear babe distract this heart; O heal
My wounded heart: but man is far too weak
To conquer nature: let thy aid divine
Support me, and assist my feeble virtue!

End of the First Act.

ACT II. SCENE I.

ZAMTI. [*Alone.*

This tardy Etan, wherefore comes he not
To tell me—what I dread to hear? perhaps
Ere this the dreadful sacrifice is past:
I had not power to offer it myself.
O my dear child, how shall I ask my friend
The horrid question, how conceal my grief?

SCENE II.

ZAMTI, ETAN.

ZAMTI.

I see 'tis done; I know it by thy tears;
They speak too plainly.

ETAN.

Thy unhappy son—

ZAMTI.

No more of that: speak of our empire's hope,
The royal infant; is he safe?

ETAN.

He is:
Within the tombs of his great ancestors,
Concealed from every eye; to you he owes
A life begun in misery, perhaps
A fatal gift.

ZAMTI.

It is enough, he lives.

O you, to whom I pay this cruel duty,
Forgive a father's tears.

ETAN.

Alas! my lord,
You must not give away to sorrow here:
'Tis dangerous even to weep.

ZAMTI.

And whither, Etan,
Must I transport my griefs? how bear the cries,
The bitter anguish, the despair, the rage,
The execrations of a frantic mother?
May we not yet deceive her for a time?

ETAN.

We seized him in her absence, and I flew
To guard the orphan king.

ZAMTI.

Awhile, my friend,
We might impose on her credulity.
Couldst thou not say we had delivered up
The royal orphan, and concealed her son
In safety? Truth is often most destructive,
And still we love it, though it makes us wretched.
Come, Etan, let us home—O heaven! she's here!
Observe her, what despair and terror dwell
On her pale cheek!

SCENE III.

ZAMTI, IDAME.

IDAME.

Barbarian, can it be?

Could Zamti e'er command it? could he offer
The dreadful sacrifice? I'll not believe it:
Thou couldst not be more cruel than the laws
Of our proud conquerors, or the Tartar's sword.
Alas! thou weepest.

ZAMTI.

Thou too must weep with Zamti.
But thou must join with him to save thy king.

IDAME.

What! sacrifice my child!

ZAMTI.

It must be so:
Thou wert a subject ere thou wert a mother.

IDAME.

Has nature then lost all her influence o'er
A father's heart?

ZAMTI.

She has too much; but ne'er
Shall thwart my duty.

IDAME.

'Tis a barbarous virtue,
And I abhor it: I have seen, like thee,
Our empire lost, and wept our sovereign's fate;
But why pour forth an infant's guiltless blood,
Yet undemanded; why revere as gods
Your sleeping kings, that moulder in the tomb?
Hath Zamti sworn to them that he would kill
His darling child? alas! the rich and poor,
The monarch and the slave, are equal all
By nature; all alike to sorrow born,
Each has his share; and in the general wreck,

All duty bids us is—to save our own.
O had I fallen into the snare, and staid
A moment longer with the royal orphan,
My child had fallen into the cruel hands
Of ruffians; but I would have perished with him.
Nature and love recalled me, and I snatched
My lovely infant from the ravishers,
Preserved the son and mother; saved even thee,
Thou barbarous father.

ZAMTI.

Doth my son then live?

IDAME.

He doth; and thou shouldst bend to gracious heaven
For goodness thus unmerited: repent,
And be a father.

ZAMTI.

O almighty power,
Forgive the joy that, spite of all my firmness,
Thus mingles with my tears: alas! my love,
Vain are our hopes of happiness, and vain
Thy fond endeavors to prolong the life
Of our dear infant; these inhuman tyrants
Will force him from us; he must yield to fate.

IDAME.

But hear me, dearest Zamti.

ZAMTI.

He must die.

IDAME.

Barbarian, stay, and tremble at the rage
Of an afflicted desperate mother.

ZAMTI.

I
Shall do my duty, you may give up yours,
And sacrifice your husband to the foe:
This is a day of blood; let Zamti join
His murdered king, and perish with his country.

IDAME.

What is your country, what your king to me?
The name of subject is not half so sacred
As husband or as father. Love and nature
Are heaven's first great unalterable laws,
And cannot be reversed: the rest are all
From mortal man, and may be changed at pleasure.
Would I could save the royal heir, but not
By the much dearer blood of Zamti's son!
Pity a wretched mother; on my knees
I beg thee, cruel Zamti: O remember
For whom I slighted this proud conqueror,
This mighty warrior; was it not for thee?
And wilt thou not protect my son, not hear
The voice of nature pleading for thy child?

ZAMTI.

It is too much: thou dost abuse the power
Which love has given thee o'er thy Zamti's heart:
Couldst thou but see——

IDAME.

I own, my lord, I feel
A mother's weakness, and a mother's sorrows;
Yet may I boast a heart as firm as thine;
Away, and lead me on to death: I'm ready
To perish for my son.

ZAMTI.

I know thy virtues.

SCENE IV.

ZAMTI, IDAME, OCTAR.

Guards.

OCTAR.

Where are these traitors? why are my commands
Thus disobeyed? what have ye done with him,
The orphan prince? guards, bring him to our presence,
The emperor approaches; let him see
The victim at his feet: you, soldiers, watch
These rebels.

ZAMTI.

I obey, my lord, the orphan
Shall be delivered up.

IDAME.

'Tis false; he shall not:
I'll sooner lose my life than part with him.

OCTAR.

Guards, take this woman hence: the emperor comes.

SCENE V.

GENGHIS, OCTAR, OSMAN.

Guards.

GENGHIS.

At length, my friends, 'tis time to sheathe the sword,
And let the vanquished breathe; I've spread destruction
And terror through the land, but I will give

The nation peace: the royal infant's death
Shall satisfy my wrath; with him shall rot
The seeds of foul rebellion; all the plots,
Feuds and divisions, fears and jealousies,
That whilst the phantom of a royal heir
Subsists, must disunite us, he alone
Of all the hated race remains, and he
Shall follow them: henceforth we will not raze
Their boasted works, their monuments of art,
Their sacred laws; for sacred they esteem
The musty rolls, which superstition taught
Their ancestors to worship: be it so,
The error may be useful, it employs
The people, and may make them more obedient.
[*To Octar.*
Octar, to thee I shall commit the power,
To bear my standard to the western world.
[*To another officer.*
Rule thou in conquered India, and interpret
Thy sovereign's great decrees; from Samarcand
To Tanais' borders, I shall send my sons.
Away—stay, Octar.

SCENE VI.

GENGHIS, OCTAR.

GENGHIS.

Couldst thou e'er have thought
Fortune would raise me to this height of glory?
That I should reign supreme, and triumph here,
Even in this palace, where disgraced and wretched
I sought in vain for refuge, and was treated
With insolence and scorn: the proud possessors

Of this unconquered empire then disdained
A Scythian, and a haughty fair refused
That hand which now directs the fate of millions.

OCTAR.

Amidst this scene of glory, how, my lord,
Can thoughts like these disturb you?

GENGHIS.

Still the wrongs
I suffered in adversity oppress me:
I own the weakness of my foolish heart,
And hoped to find that happiness in love,
Which glory, wealth, and empire, cannot give.
It hurts my pride to think how I was spurned
By that contemptuous woman; she shall know,
At least, and see the object of her scorn.
To have her mourn the honors that she lost
In losing Genghis will be some revenge.

OCTAR.

The shouts of victory, and the voice of fame,
Have been so long familiar to my ears,
That I have little relish for the plaints
Of whining love.

GENGHIS.

Nor has thy friend indulged
That fatal passion since her proud refusal:
I own the fair Idame won my heart,
By charms unknown before: our barren deserts
Could never produce a face like hers, a mind
So formed to please; her every motion fired
My captive soul, but her imprudent scorn
Restored my freedom; nobler objects claim
A monarch's care; I'll think no more of her,

Let her repent at leisure of her pride.
Octar, I charge thee, talk not of Idame.

OCTAR.

You have, indeed, affairs of greater moment
That call for your attention.

GENGHIS.

Then farewell
To love, and all its follies.

SCENE VII.

GENGHIS, OCTAR, OSMAN.

OSMAN.

O my lord,
The victim was prepared, the guard was ranged
On every side, when (wonderful to tell!)
A strange event perplexed us all.—A woman
Of frantic mien, with wild dishevelled hair,
And bathed in tears, rushed in upon us; "stop,"
Aloud she cried, "inhuman ruffians, stop,
It is my son, you've been deceived; 'tis not
The emperor's child, but mine:" her eyes, her voice,
Her fury, her despair, her every gesture,
Was nature's language all, and spoke the mother:
When lo! her husband came, with downcast eyes
And gloomy aspect; sullenly he cried,
"This is the royal orphan, this the blood,
Which you demanded, take it:" as he spake,
Fast flowed his tears. The wretched matron, pale
And motionless awhile, as struck with death,
Fell prostrate; then, long as her faltering voice
Could utter the imperfect sound, cried out,

"Give me my son:" her sorrows were sincere,
Never was grief more bitter, doubts arose
Amongst us, and I came to know your orders.

GENGHIS.

If 'tis the work of art, I will explore
The mystery soon, and woe to the deceivers:
Think they to cast a veil before my eyes,
And mock their sovereign? let them if they dare.

OCTAR.

My lord, this woman never can deceive us;
The emperor's son was placed beneath her care;
A master's child might easily attract
The faithful servant's love, and danger make
The charge more precious still; the ties of nature
Are not more strong than those of fantasy:
But we shall soon unravel it.

GENGHIS.

Who is
This woman?

OCTAR.

Wife of a proud Mandarin:
One of those lettered sages who defy
The power of kings; a numerous band! but now,
Thank heaven, reduced by thy victorious arms
To slavery: Zamti is the traitor's name
Who watches o'er the victim.

GENGHIS.

Go, my Octar,
Interrogate this guilty pair, and learn,
If possible, the truth: let all our guards
Be ready at their posts: they talk, it seems,
Of a surprise that the Koreans mean

To march against us on the river's bank:
An army hath been seen: we soon shall know
What bold adventurers are so fond of death,
To court destruction from the sons of war,
And force them to depopulate the world.

End of the Second Act.

ACT III. SCENE I.

GENGHIS, OCTAR, OSMAN.

Attendants.

GENGHIS.

What say the captives, is the fraud discovered,
And vengeance taken on these vile impostors?
Have they delivered up the orphan prince
To Octar?

OSMAN.

Prayers, and threats, and torments, all
Are vain: the undaunted Zamti still persists
In his first answer: on his open brows
Are engraved the marks of truth: the mournful fair one,
Whose grief but adds new lustre to her charms,
With tears incessant and heart-rending sighs,
Moves every heart: spite of ourselves we wept
Her wretched fate: ne'er did my eyes behold
A sweeter mourner: she entreats to see
And speak with you; the conqueror of kings,
She hopes, will hear the wretched, and in wrath
Remember mercy; that he will protect
A guiltless child, and show mankind his goodness

Is like his power, unlimited. 'Twas thus,
My lord, she spoke of you, and I have promised
She shall have audience.

GENGHIS.

[*To one of the attendants.*
Bid her enter now,
We shall unravel this deep mystery;
But let her not imagine a few sighs,
And bidden tears, can e'er impose on me:
I have experienced all these female arts,
But I defy them now: let her be careful,
Her life depends on her sincerity.

OSMAN.

My lord, she comes.

GENGHIS.

What do I see? O heaven!
It cannot be Idame, sure my senses——

SCENE II.

GENGHIS, IDAME, OCTAR, OSMAN.

Guards.

IDAME.

My lord, I came not to solicit pardon,
My forfeit life is yours, I ask not for it:
Why should I wish for years of added woe?
But spare a guiltless infant.

GENGHIS.

Rise, Idame,
Fate conquers all, it has deceived us both.

If heaven hath raised a poor inhabitant
Of Scythia, once the object of your scorn,
To power, and splendor, you have naught to fear:
The emperor never will avenge the wrongs
Of Temugin; but public good demands
The royal victim; 'tis a sacrifice
Which must be made: for your own son, myself
Will be his guard: I promise to protect him.

IDAME.

Then I am happy.

GENGHIS.

But inform me, madam,
What is this fraud, this mystery between you?
For I must know it all.

IDAME.

O spare the wretched.

GENGHIS.

Have I not cause to hate this Zamti?

IDAME.

You,
My lord?

GENGHIS.

I've said too much.

IDAME.

Restore my child,
You've promised it.

GENGHIS.

His pardon must depend
On you alone: you know I have been injured,
My favors scorned, my orders disobeyed:
Who is this Zamti, this respected lord,

This husband? in that name alone comprised
Is every guilt: what charms has he to boast
Who braves me thus?

IDAME.

He was my only comfort,
My joy, my happiness, the best of men;
He served his God, his country, and his king.

GENGHIS.

How long, Idame, have you been united?

IDAME.

Ever since the fatal time, when wayward fortune
Espoused thy cause, and gave a tyrant power
To scourge mankind.

GENGHIS.

I understand you, madam,
E'er since the time you mean, when I was scorned
By a proud beauty, when this country first
Deserved the chains which it was doomed to wear.

SCENE III.

GENGHIS, OCTAR, OSMAN.

[*On one side of the stage.*

IDAME, and ZAMTI.

[*On the other, Guards.*

GENGHIS.

What sayest thou, slave? hast thou delivered up
The emperor's son?

ZAMTI.

I have, my lord, 'tis done:
I have fulfilled my duty.

GENGHIS.

Well thou knowest
Nor fraud, nor insolence escape my vengeance:
If thou hast dared to hide him from my wrath,
He must be found, his death shall follow thine.
[*To the guards.*
Seize and destroy that infant.

ZAMTI.

Wretched father!

IDAME.

Stay, cruel tyrant, stay, is this your pity,
Is this your promise?

GENGHIS.

I have been deceived;
Explain the mystery, madam, or he dies.

IDAME.

I'll tell thee all; and if it be a crime
To follow nature, and obey her laws,
If still thy cruel spirit thirsts for blood,
Let all your anger light on me, but spare
The noble Zamti: to our mutual care
The emperor entrusted his dear son:
Thou knowest too well what scenes of horrid slaughter
Followed thy cruel victory, and marked
Thy steps with blood; that might have satisfied
A less inhuman conqueror: when thy slaves
Demanded our last hope, the royal heir,

My generous Zamti, faithful to his king,
To duty gave up all, and sacrificed
His son, nor listened to the powerful voice
Of nature; I admired that patriot firmness
I had not strength to imitate: alas!
I am a mother, how could I consent
To my child's death? my terrors, my despair,
My rage, my anguish, all too plainly spoke
What Zamti strove to hide: behold, my lord,
The wretched father, he deserves your pity;
So does my guiltless infant: punish me,
And me alone: forgive me, dearest Zamti,
Forgive a mother's tenderness, forgive
A wife that loves thee and would save thy son.

ZAMTI.

I have forgiven thee, and, thank heaven, my king,
The royal infant's safe.

GENGHIS.

'Tis false; begone,
And find him, traitor, or thou diest; atone
For thy past crimes.

ZAMTI.

The crime were to obey
A tyrant, but my royal master's voice
Cries from the tomb, and bids me tell thee, Genghis,
Thou art my conqueror, but not my king:
Were Zamti born thy subject, he had been
Most faithful to thee: I have sacrificed
My son, and thinkest thou I can fear to die?

GENGHIS.

[*To the guard.*

Away with him.

IDAME.

O stay.

GENGHIS.

I'll hear no more.

IDAME.

I have deserved thy anger, I alone
Should feel thy vengeance: thou hast slain my king,
And now my husband and my child must fall
By thy destructive hand: inhuman tyrant,
When will thy wrath be satisfied?

GENGHIS.

Away:
Follow thy guilty husband: darest thou plead
For mercy, thou reproach me?

IDAME.

Then all hope
Is lost.

GENGHIS.

If ever I think of clemency,
It must not be till ample reparation
Is made for all my wrongs: you understand me.

SCENE IV.

GENGHIS, OCTAR.

GENGHIS.

What means this fluttering heart, and wherefore thus
Steals from my breast the involuntary sigh?
Some power divine protects her: O my Octar,

What secret charms have innocence and beauty,
That proud authority should thus submit
To own their influence? I have lost myself
And want a friend; O lend me thy kind counsel.

OCTAR.

Since I must speak, I'll speak with freedom; know
then
This dangerous branch of a detested race
Must be cut off, or we are not secure
In our new conquest; victory's best guard
Is rigor; by severity alone
Your power can be established. Time, my lord,
Will bring back order and tranquillity;
The people by degrees forget their wrongs,
Or pardon them: you then may reign in peace.

GENGHIS.

And can it be Idame, that proud beauty,
Given to another, to my mortal foe!

OCTAR.

She merits not your pity, but your hate;
I cannot, must not think you ever loved her;
'Twas but a short and momentary flame,
That sparkled and expired; her cruel scorn,
Her proud refusal, and the hand of time,
Have quite extinguished it; she is no more
To Genghis now than the ignoble wife,
Of an abandoned traitor.

GENGHIS.

He shall die;
A slave! a rival!

OCTAR.

Wherefore lives he yet?
Strike, and revenge thyself.

GENGHIS.

I know not why,
But my fond heart still trembles at the thought
Of injuring her: subdued by beauty's tears
I dare not hurt a rival and a slave;
Even in the husband I respect the wife:
Is love indeed so great a conqueror,
And must I grace his triumphs?

OCTAR.

All I know,
And all I wish for, is to follow thee,
The rattling chariot, and the sounding bow,
The fiery coursers, and the din of arms:
These are my passions, these the joys of Octar:
I am a stranger to the sighs of love,
And think them far beneath the royal soul
Of Genghis; they debase a character
So great as thine.

GENGHIS.

I know my power, I know
That I could make her mine: but what avails
The fairest form without the conquered heart?
Where is the joy to press within our arms
A trembling slave? to see her beauteous eyes
Forever bathed in tears, and her full heart
Oppressed with sorrow? 'tis a barbarous triumph:
The savage herd, that through the forest roam,
Enjoy more peace, and boast a purer love:
The fair Idame has some secret power
That charms me more than victory and empire:
I thought I could have driven her from my heart,
But she returns, and triumphs.

SCENE V.

GENGHIS, OCTAR, OSMAN.

GENGHIS.

Well: what says she?

OSMAN.

That she will perish with her husband rather
Than tell the place where, hid from every eye,
The orphan lies concealed; the tender husband
Supports her in his arms; with added courage
Inspires her soul, and teaches her to die.
They wish to be united in the grave;
The people throng around, and every eye
Is wet with tears, lamenting their sad fate.

GENGHIS.

And does Idame talk of death from me?
Fly, Osman, fly, tell her I hold her life
As sacred as my own: away.

SCENE VI.

GENGHIS, OCTAR.

OCTAR.

This infant,
Concerning him, my lord—what's to be done?

GENGHIS.

Nothing.

OCTAR.

You gave commands he should be torn
Even from Idame's bosom.

GENGHIS.

We must think
Of that hereafter.

OCTAR.

What if they should hide——

GENGHIS.

He cannot escape us.

OCTAR.

Still they may deceive you.

GENGHIS.

Idame is incapable of fraud.

OCTAR.

And would you then preserve the royal race?

GENGHIS.

I would preserve Idame; for the rest
'Tis equal all, dispose it as thou wilt.
Go, bring her hither—stay—my Octar—try
If thou canst soften this rebellious slave,
This Zamti, and persuade him to obey me.
We will not heed this infant; he shall make me
A nobler sacrifice.

OCTAR.

Who, he, my lord?

GENGHIS.

Ay, he.

OCTAR.

What hopest thou?

GENGHIS.

To subdue Idame,
To see her, to adore her, to be loved

By that ungrateful fair one; or to take
My full revenge, to punish her, and die.

END of the THIRD ACT.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

GENGHIS.

[*A troop of Tartar soldiers.*
Are these my promised joys? is this the fruit
Of all my labors? where's the liberty,
The rest I hoped for? I but feel the weight
Without the joys of power: I want Idame,
And, instead of her, a crowd of busy slaves
Are ever thronging round me.
[*To his attendants.*
Hence, away,
And guard the city walls; these proud Koreans
May think to find us unprepared; already,
It seems, they have proclaimed their orphan king;
But I'll be duped no longer; he shall die.
I am distracted with a thousand cares,
Dangers, and plots, and foes on every side;
Intruding rivals, and a wayward people,
Oppress me: when I was a poor unknown
I was more happy.

SCENE II.

OCTAR, GENGHIS.

GENGHIS.

Well, my friend, you've seen
This proud presumptuous Mandarin: what says he?

OCTAR.

He is inflexible; nor threats alarm
Nor promises allure him; still he talks
Of duty and of virtue, as if we
Were vanquished slaves, and he the conqueror.
I blush to think how we demeaned ourselves,
By talking to a wretch, whom by a word
We might destroy: let the ungrateful pair
Perish together; mutual is their crime,
And mutual be their punishment.

GENGHIS.

'Tis strange,
That sentiments like these, to us unknown,
Should rise in mortal breasts: without a groan,
A murmur, or complaint, a father breaks
The ties of nature, and would sacrifice
His child to please the manes of his sovereign,
And the fond wife would die to save her lord.
The more I see, the more must I admire
This wondrous people, great in arts and arms,
In learning and in manners great; their kings
On wisdom's basis founded all their power;
They gave the nations law, by virtue reigned,
And governed without conquest; naught hath heaven
Bestowed on us but force; our only art
Is cruel war; our business to destroy.
What have I gained by all my victories,
By all my guilty laurels stained with blood?
The tears, the sighs, the curses of mankind.
Perhaps, my friend, there is a nobler fame,
And worthier of our search: my heart in secret
Is jealous of their virtues; I would wish,
All conqueror as I am, to imitate
The vanquished.

OCTAR.

Can you then admire their weakness?
What are their boasted arts, the puny offspring
Of luxury and vice, that cannot save them
From slavery and death? the strong and brave
Are born to rule, the feeble to obey:
Labor and courage conquer all; but you
Tamely submit, a voluntary slave:
And must the brave companions of your toil
Behold their honor stained, their glory lost,
Their king dependent on a woman's smile?
Their honest hearts with indignation glow;
By me they speak, by me reproach thee, Genghis:
Excuse a friend, a fellow soldier, grown
Old in thy service; one who cannot bear
This amorous sickness of the soul, and longs
To guide thy footsteps to the paths of glory.

GENGHIS.

Go, fetch Idame.

OCTAR.

What, my lord—

GENGHIS.

Obey:
Nor dare to murmur; 'tis a subject's part
To reverence even the weakness of his master.

SCENE III.

GENGHIS. [*Alone.*

'Tis not in mortals to resist their fate;
She must be mine; what's victory without her?
I have made thousands wretched, and am now

Myself unhappy: 'midst the venal crowd
Of slaves that court my favor, is there one
That can relieve the anguish of my soul,
Or fill my heart with real bliss? I wanted
Some happy error, some delusive joy,
To mitigate the sorrows of a king,
And lessen the oppressive weight of empire;
But Octar, who should heal, hath probed my wounds
Too deeply; I have none but monsters round me,
Blood-thirsty slaves, unfeeling, merciless,
And cruel, disciplined to blood and slaughter:
O for a few soft hours of gentle love
To brighten this dark scene! they shall not judge,
Shall not arraign the conduct of their king:
Where is Idame?—ha! she comes.

SCENE IV.

GENGHIS, IDAME.

IDAME.

My lord,
'Tis cruel to insult a friendless woman,
And add fresh weight to her calamities.

GENGHIS.

Be not alarmed; your husband yet may live;
My vengeance is suspended for a while,
And for thy sake I will be merciful:
Perhaps it was decreed by heaven Idame
Should be reserved to captivate her master,
To bend the stubborn fierceness of his nature,
And soften his rude heart: you understand me;
My laws permit divorce: embrace the offer,
And make the sovereign of the world your own.

I know you love me not, but think what joys
Surround a throne; think how thy country's good,
Her welfare, and her happiness depend
On thy resolve: I know it moves thy wonder
To see a haughty conqueror at thy feet:
Forget my power, forget my cruelty,
Weigh your own interest well, and speak my fate.

IDAME.

I am indeed surprised, and so perhaps
Will Genghis be when I shall answer him:
There was a time, my lord, you well remember,
When he who holds the subject world in awe,
This terror of the nations, was no more
Than a poor soldier, friendless and unknown;
He offered me the pure unspotted heart
Of Temugin, and I with pleasure then
Would have received it.

GENGHIS.

Ha! couldst thou have loved me?

IDAME.

Perhaps I might; but those to whom I owe
My first obedience doomed me to another:
Thou knowest the power of parents o'er their children;
They are the image of that God we serve,
And next to them should be obeyed: this empire
Was founded on paternal right, on justice,
Honor, and public faith, and holy marriage;
And if it be the sacred will of heaven
That it must fall a sacrifice to thee,
And thy successful crimes, the enlivening spirit
That long supported it shall never perish:
Your fate has changed; Idame's never can.

GENGHIS.

Couldst thou have loved me then?

IDAME.

I could, my lord,
And therefore never must hereafter think
On Genghis; I am bound in sacred bonds
To Zamti; nay, I'll tell thee more; I love him,
Prefer him to the splendor of a throne,
And all the honors thou canst lavish on me:
Think not it soothes my vanity to spurn
A conqueror, all I wish is to fulfil
My duty, and do justice to myself:
Bestow your favors on some grateful heart,
Worthier than mine, that will with joy receive them:
May I implore you to conceal from Zamti
These proffered terms? 'twould wound his soul to think
My truth to him had ever thus been questioned.

GENGHIS.

He knows what I expect, and will obey
If he desires to live.

IDAME.

He never will:
Though cruel torments should extort from him
A feigned submission, my firm constancy
Would soon recall him to the paths of duty,
Of honor, truth, and virtue.

GENGHIS.

Can it be,
When this ungenerous husband would have given
Thy son to death?

IDAME.

He did: he loved his country:
It was a noble crime, and I forgive him:
He acted like a hero, and Idame
Like the fond mother: even if I had hated
I would not have been false to him.

GENGHIS.

Amazing!
Resistance but inflames my passion for thee,
And the more injured, I but love thee more:
Yet know, I have a soul that's capable
Of rage as well as tenderness.

IDAME.

I know
Thou art the master here, and life or death
Depend on thee: but tremble at the laws.

GENGHIS.

The laws! they are no more, or in my will
Alone are to be found; your laws already
Have been too fatal to me; they prevented
That happy union which my soul desired,
And bound thee to another; but they are void,
And stand dissolved by my superior power:
Obey me, madam, I have given my orders,
And I expect your husband should deliver
Into my hands the emperor and Idame:
Remember, Zamti's life depends on you:
Let prudence teach you to disarm the wrath
Of an offended king, who, blushing, owns
His foolish fondness for a worthless woman.

SCENE V.

IDAME, ASSELI.

IDAME.

Thou seest my wretched fate; the tyrant leaves me
The cruel choice of infamy or death.
O, Zamti, I must yield thee to thy fate.

ASSELI.

Rather exert the power which beauty gives thee
O'er the proud Scythian, you have found the art
To please him.

IDAME.

Would I had not! that, alas!
But makes me more unhappy.

ASSELI.

You alone
Might soften all the rigor of our fate;
For you already his relenting soul
Withheld its fierceness; you subdued his rage;
Zamti still lives, his rival, and his foe:
This bloody conqueror stands in awe of thee,
And dare not hurt him: here he first beheld
Thy lovely form, here paid his guiltless vows.

IDAME.

No more: it were a crime to think of them.

SCENE VI.

ZAMTI, IDAME, ASSELI.

IDAME.

Zamti! what brought thee hither? what kind power
Hath thus restored thee to my arms?

ZAMTI.

The tyrant
Hath given me this short respite; by his orders
I came to seek thee.

IDAME.

Hast thou heard, my Zamti,
The shameful terms proposed to save thy life,
And the dear Orphan's?

ZAMTI.

Mine's not worth thy care:
What is the loss of one unhappy being
Amidst the general ruin? O Idame,
Remember my first duty is to save
My king; whate'er we boast, whate'er we love,
To him we owe it all, except our honor,
That only good which we can call our own.
I have concealed the Orphan 'midst the tombs
Of his great ancestors, unless we soon
Fly to relieve him, he must perish there.
Korea's generous prince in vain expects him:
Etan, our faithful servant, is in chains;
Thou art our only hope; preserve the life
Of thy dear infant, and thy husband's honor.

IDAME.

What wouldst thou have me do?

ZAMTI.

Forget me, live
But for thy country, give up all to that,
And that alone; heaven points out the fair path
Of glory to thee, and a husband's death,
For Zamti soon must die, shall leave thee free
To act as best may serve the common cause:
Enslave the Tartar, make him all thy own;
And yet to leave thee to that proud usurper
Will make the pangs of death more bitter to me:
It is a dreadful sacrifice, but duty
Spreads sweet content o'er all that she inspires:
Idame, be a mother to thy king,
And reign; remember, 'tis my last command,
Preserve thy sovereign, and be happy.

IDAME.

Stay,
Thou knowest me not: thinkest thou I'll ever purchase
Those shameful honors with my Zamti's blood?
O thou art doubly guilty; love and nature
Cry out against thee! barbarous to thy son,
And still more cruel to thy wife. O Zamti,
Heaven points us out a nobler way to death.
The tyrant, whether from contempt or love
I know not, leaves me at full liberty;
I am not watched, or guarded here; I know
Each secret path and avenue that leads
To the dark tombs where thou hast hid the king;
Thither I'll fly, and to Korea's chief
Bear the rich prize, the nation's only hope,
The royal infant, as a gift from heaven:
I know 'twill be in vain, and we must die;
But we shall die with glory; we shall leave
Behind us names that, worthy of remembrance,

Shall shine forever in the rolls of time.
Now, Zamti, have I followed thy example?

ZAMTI.

Thou gracious God, who hast inspired, support her!
I blush, my love, at thy superior virtue;
Heaven grant thee power to save thy king and country!

End of the Fourth Act.

ACT V. SCENE I.

IDAME, ASSELI.

ASSELI.

All then is lost; twice in one fatal day
Have I beheld thee made a slave: alas!
What could a helpless woman unsupported
Against a mighty conqueror?

IDAME.

I have done
What duty bade me, carried in my arms
The royal infant; for a while his presence
Inspired our troops, but Genghis came, and death
Followed his steps, the savage herd prevailed,
And bore down all before them; I was made
Once more a captive.

ASSELI.

Zamti then must perish,
And share his master's fate.

IDAME.

They both must die:
Perhaps some cruel torments, worse than death,

Already are prepared; my son perhaps
Must follow them: to triumph o'er my grief,
And aggravate my sorrows, the proud tyrant
Called me before him: how his looks appalled
My shrinking soul, when thrice he lifted up
His bloody hand against the wretched infants!
Trembling I stepped between, and at his feet
Fell prostrate; rudely then he pushed me from him,
And turned aside; the savage guards around
Seemed waiting for his orders to despatch me.

ASSELI.

He cannot, dare not do it: still, thou seest,
Zamti is spared, the orphan king still lives;
Let but Idame sue to him for pardon,
And all will be forgiven.

IDAME.

O no; his love
Is turned to rage; he smiled at my distress,
Laughed at my tears, and vowed eternal hatred.

ASSELI.

And yet you may subdue him; the fierce lion
Roars in the toils, and bites his chain; he would not
Thus talk of hatred if he did not love.

IDAME.

Whether he loves or hates, 'tis time to end
This wretched being.

ASSELI.

What have you resolved?

IDAME.

When heaven hath poured out all its wrath upon us,
And filled up the sad measure of our woes,

It gives us courage to support our griefs,
And suits our strength to our calamities:
I feel new force, new vigor in my heart,
'Midst all my sorrows; henceforth I defy
The tyrant, and am mistress of my fate.

ASSELI.

But can you leave your child, the dear loved object
Of all your hopes and fears?

IDAME.

There Asseli,
You pierce my heart: O dreadful sacrifice!
I have done all to save him: the usurper
Will not descend so low as to destroy
A helpless infant; for his mother's sake,
Whom once he loved, perhaps may spare my child;
That pleasing hope at least will soothe my soul
In the dark hour of death: he will relent
When I am gone, nor carry his fierce wrath
Beyond the grave, to persecute my son.

SCENE II.

IDAME, ASSELI, OCTAR.

OCTAR.

Madam, you must attend the emperor.
[*To the guards.*
Guard you these infants; watch the door, that none
May pass this way.
[*To Asseli.*
You, madam, may retire.

IDAME.

The emperor send for me?—but I obey.
Could I have seen my Zamti first! perhaps
It is a vain request: does pity never
Dwell in a Tartar's breast? might I implore
Your friendship to assist me?

OCTAR.

No: when once
The royal word is passed, to offer counsel
Is little less than treason: you had kings
Indeed of old who gave up all their rights,
And let their subjects rule; but manners change
With times; we listen not to idle prayers,
Nor yield to woman's tears; by arms alone
We rule the subject world: therefore obey,
And wait the emperor's commands.

SCENE III.

IDAME. [*Alone.*

Thou God
Of the afflicted, who beholdest my wrongs,
Support me now, inspire me with a portion
Of my dear Zamti's courage.

SCENE IV.

GENGHIS KHAN, IDAME.

GENGHIS.

Genghis comes
Once more to humble thy proud soul; to show thee
Thy foul ingratitude, thy base return

For all my kindness to thee; yet thou knowest not
How guilty thou hast been; thou knowest not yet
Thy danger, nor the anguish of my soul;
Thou whom I loved and whom I ought to hate,
To punish, to destroy.

IDAME.

Then punish me,
And me alone; 'tis all I ask of Genghis:
Finish a life of misery, satiate here
Thy thirst of blood: Idame hath been faithful,
That is a crime thou never canst forgive:
Strike then, and be revenged.

GENGHIS.

Thou knowest I cannot;
Thou knowest I am more wretched than thyself;
But I'm resolved: the Orphan, and thy son,
Are in my power: for Zamti, he has long
Deserved to die; the rebel braves my wrath,
And yet I spare him; if you wish his life
You must forget him; death will break the chain
That binds you; then I might with justice seize
And make you mine; but know, this proud barbarian,
This Scythian tyrant, whom you treat with scorn,
Is not unworthy of Idame's love:
Abjure your marriage, and I'll raise your child
To equal rank and splendor with my own:
The orphan shall be safe, your husband spared;
Their lives, their welfare, and their happiness,
The happiness of Genghis, all depend
On thee, Idame; for I love thee still:
But think not I will bear thy cruel insults,
Thy tyrant scorn, and all the pride of beauty:
My soul, thou knowest, is violent; take heed,

Provoke it not, least vengeance fall upon thee.
Speak the decisive word that must determine
The fate of Genghis, and his empire; say,
Or must I love or hate Idame?

IDAME.

Neither:
Your hatred were unjust, your love most guilty,
And most unworthy of us both: I ask
Your justice; I demand it; 'tis a debt
Which a king owes to all: if you have lost,
I would restore it to you, and, in secret,
I know your conscience justifies Idame.

GENGHIS.

Then hatred is your choice; 'tis well; henceforth
Expect the vengeance of an injured monarch:
Your prince, your husband, and your son shall pay
For proud Idame's scorn, and with their blood
Atone for her ingratitude: their doom
Was sealed by thee, thou art their murderer.

IDAME.

Barbarous, inhuman Genghis.

GENGHIS.

So I am,
Thanks to thy kind regard! you might have had
A tender love, but you chose a master
Proud, merciless, and savage, one whose hatred
Is equal to thy own.

IDAME.

He is my king;
As such I reverence him: this single boon,
Low on my knees entreat.

GENGHIS.

Idame, rise;
Speak, I attend: perhaps some kinder thoughts—

IDAME.

Might Zamti be permitted for a while
To visit me in secret?

GENGHIS.

What?

IDAME.

My lord,
But for a moment, 'tis my last request;
Perhaps it may be better for us both.

GENGHIS.

'Tis strange: but be it so: perhaps the slave,
Taught by calamity, that best of masters,
No longer will desire the fatal honor
Of being rival to a conqueror:
On you his fate depends; divorce, or death:
Give him the choice.

[*To Octar.*

Watch here.

[*To the guards.*

Guards, follow me:
Still am I wavering, still unhappy; still
Is Genghis doomed to be the slave of love.

[*Exit.*

IDAME.

[*Alone.*

Once more Idame lives; methinks I feel
New strength and vigor shoot through every vein:
Now, Genghis, I defy thee!

SCENE V.

ZAMTI, IDAME.

IDAME.

O my Zamti,
Dearer to me than all those conquerors,
Whom servile mortals flatter into gods;
My other deity, to whom in vain
I never sue: alas, my love, too well
Thou knowest our fate; the dreadful hour is come.

ZAMTI.

I know it is.

IDAME.

In vain thy patriot care
Strove to preserve the orphan king.

ZAMTI.

That hope
Is lost; we'll think no more on it: thou hast done
Thy every duty, and I die content.

IDAME.

What will become of our dear child? forgive
A mother, Zamti; I have shown some courage,
And therefore thou wilt pardon me.

ZAMTI.

The kings
Of Cathay are no more; the nobles held
In ignominious chains; they most deserve
Our pity, who are still condemned to live.

IDAME.

O they have doomed thee to a shameful death.

"STRIKE, ZAMTI, AND BE FREE"

ZAMTI.

'Tis what I've long expected.

IDAME.

Hear me then;
Is there no path to death but from the palace?
Bulls bleed at the altar; criminals are dragged
To punishment; but generous minds are masters
Of their own fate: why meet it from the hands
Of Genghis? were we born dependent thus
On others' wills? no; let us imitate
Our bolder neighbors, live with ease, and die
When life grows burdensome: wrongs unrevenged
To them are insupportable, and death
More welcome far than infamy: they wait not
For a proud tyrant's nod, but meet their fate:
We've taught these islanders some useful arts,
And wherefore deign we not to learn from them
Some necessary virtues?—let us die.

ZAMTI.

Yes: I approve thy noble resolution,
And think, extremity of sorrow mocks
The power of laws; but wretched slaves, disarmed
As we are, and bowed down beneath our tyrants,
Must wait the blow.

IDAME.

[*Drawing out a poniard.*
Strike, Zamti, and be free.

ZAMTI.

O heaven!

IDAME.

Strike here, my Zamti, this weak arm
Perhaps might err; thy firmer hand will best
Direct the fatal stroke; now sacrifice

A faithful wife, and let her husband fall
Beside her: yes, my love, we'll die together;
With jealous eye the tyrant shall behold us
Expiring in each other's arms.

ZAMTI.

Thank heaven!
Thy virtue never fails; this is the last
The dearest mark of my Idame's love;
Receive my last farewell; give me the dagger:
Now turn aside.

IDAME.

There, take it.
[*Gives him the dagger.*
Kill me first;
Thou tremblest.

ZAMTI.

O I cannot.

IDAME.

Strike, my lord.

ZAMTI.

I shudder at the thought.

IDAME.

O cruel Zamti,
Strike here, and then——

ZAMTI.

I will—now follow me.
[*Attempts to stab himself.*

IDAME.

[*Laying hold of his arm.*
You must not—here, my lord——

SCENE VI.

GENGHIS, OCTAR, IDAME, ZAMTI.

Guards.

GENGHIS.

O heaven! disarm him.
[*Guards disarm him.*
What would ye do?

IDAME.

We would have freed ourselves
From misery and thee.

ZAMTI.

Thou wilt not envy us
The privilege to die.

GENGHIS.

Indeed I will:
O power supreme, thou witness of my wrongs
And of my weakness, thou who hast subdued
So many kings for me, shall I at last
Be worthy of thy goodness?—Zamti, thou
Still triumphest o'er me; she whom I adored,
Thy wife, had rather die by thy loved hand
Than live with Genghis: but ye both shall learn
To bear my yoke, perhaps yet more.

IDAME.

What sayest thou?

ZAMTI.

For what new scene of inhumanity
Are we reserved?

IDAME.

Why is our fate concealed?

GENGHIS.

Be not impatient; ye shall know it soon.
Ye've done me ample justice, be it mine
Now to return it: I admire you both;
You have subdued me, and I blush to sit
On Cathay's throne, whilst there are souls like yours
So much above me; vainly have I tried
By glorious deeds to build myself a name
Among the nations; you have humbled me,
And I would equal you: I did not know
That mortals could be masters of themselves;
That greatest glory I have learned from you:
I am not what I was; to you I owe
The wondrous change; I come to reunite,
To save, and to protect you: watch, Idame,
Your prince's tender years; to thee I give
The precious charge, by right of conquest mine;
Hereafter I will be a father to him:
At length you may confide in Genghis; once
I was a conqueror, now I am a king.
[*To Zamti.*
Zamti, be thou our law's interpreter,
And make the world as good and pure as thou art;
Teach reason, justice, and morality,
And let the conquered rule the conquerors;
Let wisdom reign, and still direct our valor;
Let prudence triumph over strength; her king
Will set the example, and your conqueror
Henceforth shall be obedient to your law.

IDAME.

What do I hear?

ZAMTI.

Thou art indeed our king,
And we shall bless thy sway.

IDAME.

What could inspire
This great design, and work this change?

GENGHIS.

Thy virtues.

End of the Fifth and Last Act.

BRUTUS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

JUNIUS BRUTUS,
VALERIUS PUBLICOLA. } Consuls.
TITUS, Son of Brutus.
TULLIA, Daughter of Tarquin.
ALGINA, Confidante of Tullia.
ARUNS, Ambassador from Porsenna.
MESSALA, Friend of Titus.
PROCULUS, A military Tribune.
ALBINUS, Confidant of Aruns.
Senators. Lictors.

SCENE ROME.

This tragedy was produced in 1730. It marks Voltaire's spirit of daring in treating a subject from which Shakespeare shrank as, perhaps, too painful for representation. When revived during the Revolution it was enthusiastically applauded.

BRUTUS.

ACT I. SCENE I.

BRUTUS. THE SENATE.

The scene represents part of the house appointed for the consuls on the Tarpeian mount: at a distance is seen the temple of the capitol. The senators are assembled between the temple and the house, before the altar of Mars: the two consuls, Brutus and Valerius Publicola preside; the senators ranged in a semicircle; behind them the lictors with their fasces.

BRUTUS.

At length, my noble friends, Rome's honored senate,
The scourge of tyrants, you who own no kings
But Numa's gods, your virtues, and your laws,
Our foe begins to know us: this proud Tuscan,
The fierce Porsenna, Tarquin's boasted friend,
Pleased to protect a tyrant like himself;
He who o'er Tiber's banks hath spread his hosts,
And borne his head so loftily, now speaks
In lowlier terms, respects the senate's power,
And dreads the sons of freedom and of Rome:
This day he comes, by his ambassador,
To treat of peace, and Aruns, sent by him,
Demands an audience: he attends even now
Your orders in the temple: you'll determine
Or to refuse or to admit him to us.

VALERIUS PUBLICOLA.

Whate'er his errand be, let him be sent
Back to his king; imperial Rome should never
Treat with her foes till she has conquered them:
Thy valiant son, the avenger of his country,
Has twice repulsed Etruria's haughty monarch,
And much we owe to his victorious arm:
But this is not enough; Rome, still besieged,
Sees with a jealous eye the tyrant's friends:
Let Tarquin yield to our decrees; the laws
Doomed him to exile; let him leave the realm,
And purge the state of royal villainy;
Perhaps we then may listen to his prayers.
But this new embassy, it seems, has caught
Your easy faith: can you not see that Tarquin,
Who could not conquer, thinks he may deceive you.
I never loved these king's ambassadors,
The worst of foes beneath the mask of friendship;
Who only bear an honorable title,
And come to cheat us with impunity;
Armed with state-cunning, or elate with pride,
Commissioned to insult us, or betray.
Listen not, Rome, to their deluding tongues;
Stranger to art, thy business is, to fight;
Conquer the foes that murmur at thy glory,
Punish the pride of kings, or fall thyself;
Such be thy treaties.

BRUTUS.

Rome already knows
How much I prize her safety and her freedom;
The same my spirit, and the same my purpose,
I differ in opinion from Valerius;
And must confess, this first great homage paid
The citizens of Rome, to me is grateful.

I would accustom the despotic power
Of princes on an easy level first
To treat with our renowned commonweal,
Till heaven shall crown our arms with victory,
And make them subjects; then, Publicola,
As such we'll use them: meantime, Aruns comes,
Doubtless to mark the state of Rome, to count
Her treasures, and observe her growing power,
And therefore would I have him be admitted;
Would have him know us fully: a king's slave
Shall look on men; the novelty may please him:
Let him at leisure cast his eyes o'er Rome,
Let him behold her in your patriot breasts,
You are her best defence; let him revere
The God who calls us hither; let him see
The senate, hear and tremble.

VALERIUS PUBLICOLA.

I submit;
[*The senators rise and come forward to give their votes.*
The general voice is yours: Rome and her Brutus
Must be obeyed: for me, I disapprove it:
Lictors, attend, and introduce him to us:
Never may Rome repent of this!
[*To Brutus.*
On thee
Our eyes are fixed; on Brutus, who first broke
Our chains; let freedom use a father's voice,
And speak by thee.

SCENE II.

THE SENATE, ARUNS, ALBINUS.

Attendants.

[*Aruns enters, preceded by two lictors, with Albinus, his friend; he passes by the consuls and senate, salutes them, and sits down on a seat prepared for him towards the front of the stage.*

ARUNS.

With pleasure I behold
This great assembly, Rome's illustrious senate,
And her sage consuls, famed for truth and justice,
Which ne'er till now suffered reproach or blame:
I know your deeds, and I admire your virtues;
Unlike the wild licentious multitude,
The vulgar crowd, whom party rage or joins
Or disunites, who love and hate by turns,
They know not why, taught in one changeful hour
To boast or beg, to rail or to obey;
Whose rashness——

BRUTUS.

Stop, and learn with more respect
To treat the citizens of Rome; for know,
It is the senate's glory and her praise
To represent that brave and virtuous people
Whom thou hast thus reviled: for ourselves,
Let us not hear the voice of flattery;
It is the poison of Etrurian courts,

But ne'er has tainted yet a Roman senate.
On with thy message.

ARUNS.

Little doth the pride
Of Rome affect me; but I own I feel
For her misfortunes, and would plead her cause
With filial love: you see the gathering storm
Hangs o'er your heads, and threatens sure destruction:
In vain hath Titus striven to save his country;
With pity I behold that noble youth,
Whose ardent courage labors to support
Expiring Rome, and make her fall more glorious:
His victories cost you dear; they thin your ramparts,
And weaken your small force: no longer then
Refuse a peace so needful to your safety.
The senate bears a father's love to Rome,
So does Porsenna to the hapless kings
Whom you oppress: but tell me, you who judge
Depending monarchs, you who thus determine
The rights of all mankind, was it not here,
Even at these altars, at this capitol,
You called the gods to witness your allegiance,
And bound your faith to your acknowledged king,
To Tarquin? Say, what power has broken the tie?
Who snatched the diadem from Tarquin's head?
Who can acquit you of your oaths?

BRUTUS.

Himself:
Talk not of ties dissolved by guilt, of gods
Whom he renounced, or rights which he has lost;
We paid him homage, bound ourselves by oath,
Oaths of obedience, not of slavery:
But since thou bidst us call to our remembrance,

The senate making vows for Tarquin's health,
And kneeling at his feet, remember thou,
That on this sacred spot, this altar here,
Before the same attesting gods, that Tarquin
Swore to be just; such was the mutual bond
Of prince and people, and he gave us back
The oath we made, when he forgot his own:
Since to Rome's laws no more he pays obedience,
Rome is no longer subject to his power,
And Tarquin is the rebel, not his people.

ARUNS.

But, grant it true, that power unlimited,
And absolute dominion, had misled
The unhappy monarch from the paths of duty,
Is there a man from human error free?
Is there a king without some human weakness?
Or if there were, have you a right to punish,
You, who were born his subjects; you, whose duty
Is to obey? The son doth never arm
Against the sire, but with averted eyes
Laments his errors, and reveres him still:
And not less sacred are the rights of kings;
They are our fathers, and the gods alone
Their judges: if in anger heaven sometimes
Doth send them down, why would you therefore call
For heavier chains, and judgments more severe?
Why violate the laws you would defend,
And only change your empire to destroy it?
Taught by misfortune, best of monitors,
Tarquin henceforth, more worthy of his throne,
Will be more wise and just; the legal bonds
Of king and people now may be confirmed
By happiest union; public liberty
Shall flourish then beneath the awful shade
Of regal power.

BRUTUS.

Aruns, 'tis now too late:
Each nation has its laws, by nature given,
Or changed by choice: Etruria, born to serve,
Hath ever been the slave of kings or priests;
Loves to obey, and, happy in her chains,
Would bind them on the necks of all mankind.
Greece boasts her freedom; soft Ionia bends
Beneath a shameful bondage; Rome had once
Her kings, but they were never absolute:
Her first great citizen was Romulus,
With him his people shared the weight of empire;
Numa was governed by the laws he made;
Rome fell at last indeed beneath herself,
When from Etruria she received her kings,
Or from Porsenna; tyranny and vice
From your corrupted courts flowed in upon us.
Forgive us, gods, the crime of sparing Tarquin
So many years! at length his murderous hands,
Dyed with our blood, have broke the shameful chain
Of our long slavery, and the Roman people
Have through misfortune found the road to virtue:
Tarquin restores the rights by Tarquin lost,
And by his crimes has fixed the public safety:
We've taught the Etruscans how to shake off tyrants,
And hope they'll profit by the fair example.
[*The consuls descend towards the altar, and the senate rises.*
O Mars, thou god of battles, and of Rome!
Thou who dost guard these sacred walls, and fight
For thy own people, on thy altar here
Deign to accept our solemn oaths, for me
And for the senate, for thy worthy sons:
If in Rome's bosom there be found a traitor,

Who weeps for banished kings, and seeks once more
To be a slave, in torments shall he die;
His guilty ashes, scattered to the winds,
Shall leave behind a more detested name,
Even than those tyrant kings which Rome abhors.

ARUNS.

[*Stepping towards the altar.*
And on this altar, which you thus profane,
I call that god to witness, in the name
Of him whom you oppress, the injured Tarquin,
And great Porsenna, his avenger, here
I swear eternal war with you, O Romans!
And your posterity—
[*The senators are going off towards the capitol.*
A moment stop
Ere you depart, O senators! and hear
What I have more to offer: Tarquin's daughter,
Must she too fall a sacrifice to Rome?
With ignominious fetters will ye bind
Her royal hands, to triumph o'er her father,
Whose treasures you detain? Ungenerous victors!
As if the right of conquest gave them to you:
Where are his riches? was it for the spoil
You robbed him of his throne? let Brutus speak,
And own the plunder.

BRUTUS.

Little dost thou know
Of Rome, her manners, and her noble nature;
But learn, mistaken man, her great protectors,
The friends of truth and justice, are grown old
In honest poverty; above the pride
Of wealth, which they disdain; it is their boast
To conquer kings, who love such tinsel greatness.

Take back your gold, it is beneath our notice;
And for the hateful tyrant's hapless daughter,
Though I abhor the wretched race, yet know
The senate has consigned her to my care:
She hath not tasted here the baneful cup
Of flattery, that sweet poison of a court,
Or viewed the pomp and dangerous luxury
Of Tarquin's palace: little did her youth
Profit by them; but all that to her age
And sex was due, all her misfortunes claimed,
She hath received: let her return this day
To Tarquin; Brutus yields her back with joy:
Naught should the tyrant have within these walls
But Rome's fixed hatred, and the wrath of heaven:
You have a day to carry off your treasures,
That must suffice: meantime, the sacred rights
Of hospitality await thee here;
Beneath my roof thou mayest remain in safety:
The senate thus by me decrees: bear thou
Our answer to Porsenna, and then tell
Proud Tarquin, you have seen a Roman senate.
[*Turning to the senators.*
Let us, my friends, adorn the capitol
With laurel wreaths, that round the brows of Titus
Have spread their noble shade; the arrows too,
And bloody ensigns, his victorious hand
Hath wrested from the Etruscans: ever thus,
From age to age, may the successful race
Of Brutus still defend their much loved country:
Thus, O ye gods, may you protect us ever;
Guide the son's arm, and bless the father's councils!

SCENE III.

ARUNS, ALBINUS.

[*Supposed to have retired from the hall of audience into an apartment of Brutus' house.*

ARUNS.

Didst thou observe the fierce unbending spirit
Of this proud senate, which believes itself
Invincible? and so perhaps it might be,
Were Rome at leisure to confirm her sons
In valor and in wisdom: liberty,
That liberty, my friend, which all adore,
And I admire, though I would wrest it from them,
Inspires the heart of man with nobler courage
Than nature gives, and warmth almost divine.
Beneath the Tarquin's yoke, a slavish court
Enfeebled their corrupted hearts, and spoiled
Their active valor; whilst their tyrant kings,
Busied in conquering their own subjects, left
Our happier Etruscans in the arms of peace;
But if the senate should awake their virtues,
If Rome is free, Italia soon must fall:
These lions, whom their keepers made so gentle,
Will find their strength again, and rush upon us;
Let us then stop this rapid stream of woes,
Even at its source, and free a sinking world
From slavery; let us bind these haughty Romans
Even with the chains which they would throw on us,
And all mankind.—But will Messala come,
May I expect him here? and will he dare—

ALBINUS.

My Lord, he will attend you; every minute
We look for him; and Titus is our friend.

ARUNS.

Have you conferred; may I depend on him?

ALBINUS.

Messala, if I err not, means to change
His own estate, rather than that of Rome;
As firm and fearless as if honor guided,
And patriot love inspired him; ever secret,
And master of himself; no passions move
No rage disturbs him; in his height of zeal
Calm and unruffled.

ARUNS.

Such he seemed to me
When first I saw him at the court of Tarquin;
His letters since—but, see, he comes.

SCENE IV.

ARUNS, MESSALA, ALBINUS.

ARUNS.

Messala,
Thou generous friend of an unhappy master,
Will neither Tarquin's nor Porsenna's gold
Shake the firm faith of these rough senators?
Will neither fear, nor hope, nor pleasure bend
Their stubborn hearts? These fierce patrician chiefs,
That judge mankind, are they without or vice
Or passion? is there aught that's mortal in them?

MESSALA.

Their boasts are mighty, but their false pretence
To justice, and the fierce austerity
Of their proud hearts, are nothing but the thirst
Of empire; their pride treads on diadems;
Yet whilst they break one chain, they forge another.
These great avengers of our liberty,
Armed to defend it, are its worst oppressors:
Beneath the name of patrons they assume
The part of monarchs; Rome but changed her fetters,
And for one king hath found a hundred tyrants.

ARUNS.

Is there amongst your citizens a man
Honest enough to hate such shameful bondage?

MESSALA.

Few, very few, yet feel their miseries:
Their spirits, still elate with this new change,
Are mad with joy: the meanest wretch among them,
Because he helped to pull down monarchy,
Assumes its pride, and thinks himself a king:
But I've already told you I have friends,
Who with reluctance bend to this new yoke;
Who look with scorn on a deluded people,
And stem the torrent with unshaken firmness;
Good men and true, whose hands and hearts were made
To change the state of kingdoms, or destroy them.

ARUNS.

What may I hope from these brave Romans? say,
Will they serve Tarquin?

MESSALA.

They'll do anything;
Their lives are thine; but think not, like blind vassals,
They will obey a base ungrateful master:
They boast no wild enthusiastic zeal,
To fall the victims of despotic power,
Or madly rush on death to save a tyrant,
Who will not know them. Tarquin promises
Most nobly, but when he shall be their master,
Perhaps he then may fear, perhaps forget them.
I know the great too well: in their misfortunes
No friends so warm; but in prosperity,
Ungrateful oft, they change to bitterest foes:
We are the servile tools of their ambition;
When useless, thrown aside with proud disdain,
Or broke without remorse when we grow dangerous.
Our friends expect conditions shall be made;
On certain terms you may depend upon them:
They only ask a brave and worthy leader
To please their fickle taste; a man well known,
And well respected; one who may have power
To force the king to keep his plighted faith
If we succeed; and if we fail, endued
With manly courage to avenge our cause.

ARUNS.

You wrote me word the haughty Titus—

MESSALA.

Titus
Is Rome's support, the son of Brutus; yet—

ARUNS.

How does he brook the senate's base reward

For all his services? he saved the city,
And merited the consulship, which they,
I find, refuse him.

MESSALA.

And he murmurs at it.
I know his proud and fiery soul is full
Of the base injury: for his noble deeds,
Naught has he gained but a vain empty triumph;
A fleeting shadow of unreal bliss:
I am no stranger to his throbbing heart,
And strength of passion; in the paths of glory
So lately entered, 'twere an easy task
To turn his steps aside; for fiery youth
Is easily betrayed: and yet what bars
To our design! a consul, and a father;
His hate of kings; Rome pleading for her safety;
The dread of shame, and all his triumphs past.
But I have stole into his heart, and know
The secret poison that inflames his soul:
He sighs for Tullia.

ARUNS.

Ha! for Tullia?

MESSALA.

Yes:
Scarce could I draw the secret from his breast;
He blushed himself at the discovery,
Ashamed to own his love; for midst the tumult
Of jarring passions, still his zeal prevails
For liberty.

ARUNS.

Thus on a single heart,
And its unequal movements, must depend,
Spite of myself, the fate of Rome: but hence,

Albinus, and prepare for Tarquin's tent.
[*Turning to Messala.*
We'll to the princess: I have gained some knowledge,
By long experience, of the human heart:
I'll try to read her soul; perhaps her hands
May weave a net to catch this Roman senate.

End of the First Act.

ACT II. SCENE I.

The scene represents an apartment in the palace of the consuls.

TITUS, MESSALA.

MESSALA.

No: 'tis unkind; it hurts my tender friendship:
He who but half unveils his secrets, tells
Too little or too much: dost thou suspect me?

TITUS.

Do not reproach me; my whole heart is thine.

MESSALA.

Thou who so lately didst with me detest
The rigorous senate, and pour forth thy plaints
In anguish; thou who on this faithful bosom
Didst shed so many tears, couldst thou conceal
Griefs far more bitter, the keen pangs of love?
How could ambition quench the rising flame,
And blot out every tender sentiment?
Dost thou detest the hateful senate more
Than thou lovest Tullia?

TITUS.

O! I love with transport,
And hate with fury; ever in extreme;
It is the native weakness of my soul,
Which much I strive to conquer, but in vain.

MESSALA.

But why thus rashly tear thy bleeding wounds?
Why weep thy injuries, yet disguise thy love?

TITUS.

Spite of those injuries, spite of all my wrongs,
Have I not shed my blood for this proud senate?
Thou knowest I have, and didst partake my glory;
With joy I told thee of my fair success;
It showed, methought, a nobleness of soul
To fight for the ungrateful, and I felt
The pride of conscious virtue: the misfortunes
We have o'ercome with pleasure we impart,
But few are anxious to reveal their shame.

MESSALA.

Where is the shame, the folly, or disgrace:
And what should Titus blush at?

TITUS.

At myself:
At my fond foolish passion, that o'erpowers
My duty.

MESSALA.

Are ambition then, and love,
Passions unworthy of a noble mind?

TITUS.

Ambition, love, resentment, all possess
The soul of Titus, and by turns inflame it:

These consul kings despise my youth; deny me
My valor's due reward, the price of blood
Shed in their cause: then, midst my sorrows, seize
All I hold dear, and snatch my Tullia from me.
Alas! I had no hope, and yet my heart
Grows jealous now: the fire, long pent within,
Bursts forth with inextinguishable rage.
I thought it had been o'er; she parted from me,
And I had almost gained the victory
O'er my rebellious passion: but my race
Of glory now is run, and heaven has fixed
Its period here: Gods! that the son of Brutus,
The foe of kings, should ever be the slave
Of Tarquin's race! nay, the ungrateful fair
Scorns to accept my conquered heart: I'm slighted;
Disdained on every side, and shame o'erwhelms me.

MESSALA.

May I with freedom speak to thee?

TITUS.

Thou mayest;
Thou knowest I ever have revered thy prudence;
Speak therefore, tell me all my faults, Messala.

MESSALA.

No: I approve thy love, and thy resentment:
Shall Titus authorize this tyrant senate,
These sons of arrogance? if thou must blush,
Blush for thy patience, Titus, not thy love.
Are these the poor rewards of all thy valor,
Thy constancy, and truth? a hopeless lover.
A weak and powerless citizen of Rome,
A poor state-victim, by the senate braved,
And scorned by Tullia: sure a heart like thine
Might find the means to be revenged on both.

TITUS.

Why wilt thou flatter my despairing soul?
Thinkest thou I ever could subdue her hate,
Or shake her virtue? 'tis impossible:
Thou seest the fatal barriers to our love,
Which duty and our fathers place between us:
But must she go?

MESSALA.

This day, my lord.

TITUS.

Indeed!
But I will not complain: for heaven is just
To her deservings; she was born to reign.

MESSALA.

Heaven had perhaps reserved a fairer empire
For beauteous Tullia, but for this proud senate,
But for this cruel war, nay but for Titus:
Forgive me, sir, you know the inheritance
She might have claimed; her brother dead, the throne
Of Rome had been her portion—but I've gone
Too far—and yet, if with my life, O Titus,
I could have served thee, if my blood——

TITUS.

No more:
My duty calls, and that shall be obeyed:
Man may be free, if he resolves to be so:
I own, the dangerous passion for a time
O'erpowered my reason; but a soldier's heart
Braves every danger: love owes all his power
To our own weakness.

MESSALA.

The ambassador
From Etruria is here: this honor, Sir——

TITUS.

O fatal honor! what would he with me?
He comes to snatch my Tullia from my sight;
Comes to complete the measure of my woes.

SCENE II.

TITUS, ARUNS.

ARUNS.

After my long and fruitless toils to serve
The state of Rome, and her ungrateful senate,
Permit me here to pay the homage due
To generous courage, and transcendent virtue;
Permit me to admire the gallant hero
Who saved his country on the brink of ruin:
Alas! thou hast deserved a fairer meed,
A cause more noble, and another foe;
Thy valor merited a better fate:
Kings would rejoice, and such I know there are,
To trust their empire with an arm like thine,
Who would not dread the virtues they admire,
Like jealous Rome and her proud senate: O!
I cannot bear to see the noble Titus
Serving these haughty tyrants; who, the more
You have obliged them, hate you more: to them
Your merit's a reproach; mean vulgar souls,
Born to obey, they lift the oppressive hand
Against their great deliverer, and usurp

Their sovereign's rights; from thee they should receive
Those orders which they give.

TITUS.

I thank you, Sir,
For all your cares, your kind regard for Titus,
And guess the cause: your subtle policy
Would wind me to your secret purposes,
And arm my rage against the commonweal;
But think not to impose thus on my frankness;
My heart is open, and abhors design:
The senate have misused me, and I hate them,
I ought to hate them; but I'll serve them still:
When Rome engages in the common cause,
No private quarrels taint the patriot breast;
Superior then to party strife, we rush
United on against the general foe:
Such are my thoughts, and such they ever will be;
Thou knowest me now: or call it virtue in me,
Or call it partial fondness, what you please,
But, born a Roman, I will die for Rome,
And love this hard unjust suspicious senate,
More than the pomp and splendor of a court
Beneath a master, for I am the son
Of Brutus, and have graved upon my heart
The love of freedom, and the hate of kings.

ARUNS.

But does not Titus soothe his flattered heart
With fancied bliss, and visionary charms?
I too, my lord, though born within the sway
Of regal power, am fond of liberty;
You languish for her, yet enjoy her not.
Is there on earth, with all your boasted freedom,

Aught more despotic than a commonweal?
Your laws are tyrants; and their barbarous rigor
Deaf to the voice of merit, to applause,
To family, and fame, throws down distinction;
The senate grind you, and the people scorn;
You must affright them, or they will enslave you:
A citizen of Rome is ever jealous
Or insolent; he is your equal still,
Or still your foe, because inferior to you:
He cannot bear the lustre of high fortune;
Looks with an eye severe on every action;
In all the service you have done him, sees
Naught but the injury you have power to do;
And for the blood which you have shed for him,
You'll be repaid at last with——banishment.
A court, I own's a dangerous element,
And has its storms, but not so frequent; smooth
Its current glides, its surface more serene:
That boasted native of another soil,
Fair liberty, here sheds her sweetest flowers:
A king can love, can recompense your service,
And mingles happiness with glory; there
Cherished beneath the shade of royal favor,
Long mayest thou flourish, only serve a master,
And be thyself the lord of all beside:
The vulgar, ever to their sovereign's will
Obedient, still respect and honor those
Whom he protects, nay love his very faults:
We never tremble at a haughty senate,
Or her harsh laws: O! would that, born as thou art,
To shine with equal lustre in a court
Or in a camp, thou wouldst but taste the charms
Of Tarquin's goodness! for he loved thee, Titus,
And would have shared his fortunes with thee; then
Had the proud senate, prostrate at thy feet———

TITUS.

I've seen the court of Tarquin, and despise it:
I know I might have cringed for his protection,
Been his first slave, and tyrannized beneath him;
But, thanks to heaven, I am not fallen so low:
I would be great, but not by meanness rise
To grandeur: no, it never was my fate
To serve: I'll conquer kings, do thou obey them.

ARUNS.

I must approve thy constancy; but think,
My lord, how Tarquin, in thy infant years,
Guided thy tender youth: he oft remembers
The pleasing office, and but yesterday,
Lamenting his lost son, and sad misfortunes,
"Titus," said he, "was once my best support,
He loved us all, and he alone deserved
My kingdom and my daughter."

TITUS.

Ha! his daughter!
Ye gods! my Tullia! O unhappy vows!

ARUNS.

Even now I carry her to Tarquin; him
Whom thou hast thus deserted, far from thee,
And from her country, soon must Tullia go;
Liguria's king accepts of her in marriage:
Meantime thou, Titus, must obey the senate,
Oppress her father, and destroy his kingdom:
And may these vaulted roofs, these towers in flame,
And this proud capitol in ashes laid,
Like funeral torches, shine before your people,
To light the Roman senate to its grave,
Or serve to grace our happy Tullia's nuptials!

SCENE III.

TITUS, MESSALA.

TITUS.

Messala, in what anguish hath he left me!
Would Tarquin then have given her to my arms!
O cruel fate! and might I thus—O no,
Deceitful minister! thou camest to search
My foolish heart; alas! he saw too well,
Read in my eyes the dear destructive passion,
He knows my weakness, and returns to Tarquin
To smile at Titus, and insult his love:
And might I then have wedded her, possessed
That lovely maid, and spent a life of bliss
Within her arms, had heaven allotted me
So fair a fate! O I am doubly wretched.

MESSALA.

Thou mightest be happy; Aruns would assist thee,
Trust me, he would, and second thy warm wishes.

TITUS.

No: I must bid adieu to my fond hopes;
Rome calls me to the capitol; the people
Who raised triumphal arches to my glory,
And love me for my labors past, expect me,
To take with them the inviolable oath,
The solemn pledge of sacred liberty.

MESSALA.

Go then, and serve your tyrants.

TITUS.

I will serve them;
It is my duty, and I must fulfil it.

MESSALA.

And yet you sigh.

TITUS.

'Tis a hard victory.

MESSALA.

And bought too dearly.

TITUS.

Therefore 'tis more glorious.
Messala, do not leave me in affliction.

[*Exit Titus.*

MESSALA.

I'll follow him, to sharpen his resentment,
And strike the envenomed dagger to his heart.

SCENE IV.

BRUTUS, MESSALA.

BRUTUS.

Messala, stop; I'd speak with you.

MESSALA.

With me?

BRUTUS.

With you. A deadly poison late hath spread
Its secret venom o'er my house: my son,
Tiberius, is with jealous rage inflamed
Against his brother; it appears too plain;
Whilst Titus burns with most unjust resentment
Against the senate: the ambassador,
That shrewd Etruscan, has observed their weakness,
And doubtless profits by it: he has talked

To both: I dread the tongues of subtle statesmen,
Grown old in the chicanery of a court:
To-morrow he returns: a day's too much
To give a traitor, and ofttimes is fatal:
Go thou, Messala, tell him he must hence
This day: I'll have it so.

MESSALA.

'Tis prudent, Sir,
And I obey you.

BRUTUS.

But this is not all:
My son, the noble Titus, loves thee well;
I know the power that sacred friendship hath
O'er minds like his; a stranger to distrust
Or diffidence, he yields his artless soul
To thy experience; and the more his heart
Relies on thee, the more may I expect,
That, able as thou art to guide his steps,
Thou wilt not turn them from the paths of virtue,
Or take advantage of his easy youth
To taint his guiltless heart with fond ambition.

MESSALA.

That was even now the subject of our converse;
He strives to imitate his godlike sire;
Rome's safety is the object of his care:
Blindly he loves his country, and his father.

BRUTUS.

And so he ought; but above all, the laws;
To them he should be still a faithful slave;
Who breaks the laws, can never love his country.

MESSALA.

We know his patriot zeal, and both have seen it.

BRUTUS.

He did his duty.

MESSALA.

Rome had done hers too,
If she had honored more so good a son.

BRUTUS.

Messala, no: it suited not his age
To take the consulship; he had not even
The voice of Brutus: trust me, the success
Of his ambition would have soon corrupted
His noble mind, and the rewards of virtue
Had then become hereditary: soon
Should we have seen the base unworthy son
Of a brave father claim superior rank,
Unmerited, in sloth and luxury,
As our last Tarquin but too plainly proved.
How very seldom they deserve a crown
Who're born to wear it! O! preserve us, heaven,
From such destructive vile abuse of power,
The nurse of folly, and the grave of virtue!
If thou indeed dost love my son, (and much
I hope thou dost) show him a fairer path
To glory; root out from his heart the pride
Of false ambition: he who serves the state
Is amply recompensed: the son of Brutus
Should shine a bright example to the world
Of every virtue: he is Rome's support,
As such I look upon him; and the more
He has already done to serve his country,
The more I shall require of him hereafter.
Know then by what I wish the love I bear him,
Temper the heat of youth; to flatter Titus
Were death to him, and injury to Rome.

MESSALA.

My lord, I am content to follow Titus,
To imitate his valor, not instruct him:
I have but little influence o'er your son;
But, if he deigns to listen to my counsels,
Rome soon will see how much he loves her glory.

BRUTUS.

Go then, be careful not to soothe his errors;
For I hate tyrants much, but flatterers more.
[*Exit Brutus.*

SCENE V.

MESSALA.

[*Alone.*

There's not a tyrant more detestable,
More cruel than thy own relentless soul;
But I shall tread perhaps beneath my feet
The pride of all thy false insulting virtue:
Yes, thou Colossus, raised thus high above us
By a vile crowd, the thunder is prepared,
Soon shall it fall, and crush thee into ruin.

End of the Second Act.

ACT III. SCENE I.

ARUNS, ALBINUS, MESSALA.

ARUNS.

[*A letter in his hand.*

At length, my friend, a dawn of fair success

Breaks in upon us; thou hast served me nobly,
And all is well: this letter, my Albinus,
Decides the fate of Tarquin, and of Rome.
But, tell me, have you fixed the important hour?
Have you watched closely the Quirinal gate?
If our conspirators to-night should fail
To yield the ramparts up, will your assault
Be ready? Is the king well satisfied,
Thinkest thou, Albinus, we shall bring him back
To Rome subjected, or to Rome in blood?

ALBINUS.

My lord, by midnight all will be prepared;
Tarquin already reaps the promised harvest;
From you, once more, receives the diadem,
And owns himself indebted more to Aruns
Than to Porsenna.

ARUNS.

Or the envious gods,
Foes to our hapless sovereign, must destroy
Our fair design, well worthy of their aid;
Or by to-morrow's dawn rebellious Rome
Shall own a master; Rome perhaps in ashes,
Or bathing in her blood. But better is it
A king should rule o'er an unhappy people,
Who are obedient, than in plenty's lap,
O'er a proud nation, who are still perverse
And obstinate, because they are too happy.
Albinus, I attend the Princess here
In secret——Stay, Messala.

SCENE II.

ARUNS, MESSALA.

ARUNS.

Touching Titus,
What has thou done? couldst thou prevail on him
To serve the cause of Tarquin? couldst thou bind
His haughty soul?

MESSALA.

No: I presumed too far;
He is inflexible: he loves his country,
And has too much of Brutus in him; murmurs
Against the senate, but still dotes on Tullia:
Pride and ambition, love and jealousy,
Opened, I thought, a passage to his soul,
And gave my arts some promise of success;
But, strange infatuation! liberty
Prevailed o'er all: his love is desperate,
Yet Rome is stronger even than love: in vain
I strove, by slow degrees, to efface the horror
Which Rome had taught his foolish heart to feel
Even at the name of king; in vain opposed
His rooted prejudice; the very mention
Of Tarquin fired his soul; he would not hear me,
But broke off the discourse: I must have gone
Too far, had I persisted.

ARUNS.

Then, Messala,
There are no hopes of him.

MESSALA.

Much less reluctant
I found his brother; one of Brutus' sons,
At least is ours.

ARUNS.

Already hast thou gained
Tiberius? by what lucky art, Messala——

MESSALA.

His own ambition did it all: long time,
With jealous eye, hath he beheld the honors
Heaped on his brother, that eclipse his own;
The wreath of laurel, and the pomp of triumph,
The waving ensigns, with the people's love,
And Brutus' fondness, lavished all on Titus,
Like deepest injuries, sunk into his soul,
And helped to fill the poisoned cup of envy;
Whilst Titus, void of malice or revenge,
Too much superior to be jealous of him,
Stretched forth his hand from his triumphal car,
As if he wished to give his brother part
Of all his glories: I embraced, with joy,
The lucky minute; pointed out the paths
Of glory; promised, in the name of Tarquin,
All the fair honors Rome could give, the throne
Alone excepted: I perceived him stagger,
And saw him bend, by slow degrees, before me:
He's yours, my lord, and longs to speak with you.

ARUNS.

Will he deliver the Quirinal gate,
Messala?

MESSALA.

Titus is commander there,
And he alone can give it us: already

His virtues have been fatal to our purpose;
He is the guardian deity of Rome:
The attack is dangerous: without his support
Success were doubtful, with it all is certain.

ARUNS.

If he solicited the consulship,
Thinkest thou he would refuse the sovereign power,
The sure reversion of a throne with Tullia?

MESSALA.

'Twere an affront to his exalted virtue
To offer him a throne.

ARUNS.

And Tullia with it?

MESSALA.

O he adores her; and even loves her more,
Because he strives to hate; detests the father,
And rages for the daughter; dreads to speak,
Yet mourns in silence; seeks her everywhere,
Yet shuns her presence, and drinks up his tears
In secret anguish: all the rage of love
Possesses him; sometimes in storms like these
A lucky moment turns the wavering mind.
Titus, I know, is turbulent and bold;
And, if we gain him, may, perhaps, go further
Even than we wish: who knows but fierce ambition
May yet rekindle by the torch of love!
His heart would glow with pleasure, to behold
The trembling senate prostrate at his feet.
Yet, let me not deceive you with the hopes,
That Titus ever will be ours; once more,
However, I shall try his stubborn virtue.

ARUNS.

If still he loves, I shall depend on him:
One look of Tullia's, one sweet word from her,
Will soften his reluctant heart much more,
Than all the arts of Aruns or Messala:
For, O, believe me, we must hope for naught
From men, but through their weakness and their follies:
Titus and Tullia must promote our cause;
The one's ambition, and the other's love:
These, these, my friend, are the conspirators
That best will serve the king: from them I hope
Much more than from myself.

[*Exit Messala.*

SCENE III.

TULLIA, ARUNS, ALGINA.

ARUNS.

This letter, Madam,
With orders to deliver it to your hands,
I have received from Tarquin.

TULLIA.

Gracious heaven!
Preserve my father, and reverse his fate!

[*She reads.*

"The throne of Rome may from its ashes rise,
And he who was the conqueror of his king
Be his restorer: Titus is a hero,
He must defend that sceptre which I wish
To share with him. Remember, O my Tullia,

That Tarquin gave thee life; remember too,
My fate depends on thee; thou mayest refuse
Liguria's king: if Titus be thy choice,
He's mine; receive him for thy husband."
Ha!
Read I aright! Titus! impossible!
Could Tarquin, could my father, still unmoved
In all his sorrows, thus at last relent?
How could he know, or whence——
[*Turning to Messala.*
Alas, my lord,
'Tis but to search the secrets of my heart
You try me thus: pity a wretched princess,
Nor spread your snares for helpless youth like mine.

ARUNS.

Madam, I only mean to obey your father,
And serve his honored daughter; for your secrets,
In me it were presumption to remove
The sacred veil which you have drawn before them;
My duty only bids me say, that heaven
By you determines to restore our empire.

TULLIA.

And is it possible, that Tullia thus
Should be the friend of Tarquin, and the wife
Of Titus?

ARUNS.

Doubt it not: that noble hero
Already burns to serve the royal race:
His generous heart abhors the savage fierceness
Of this new commonweal; his pride was hurt
By their refusal of his just demand:
The work's half done, and thou must finish it.
I have not looked into his heart; but sure,

If he knows Tullia well, he must adore her:
Who could behold, unmoved, a diadem
By thee presented, and with thee adorned?
Speak to him then, for thou alone hast power
To triumph o'er this enemy of kings:
No longer let the senate boast of Titus,
Their best support, the guardian god of Rome;
But be it Tullia's glory to possess
The great defender of her father's cause,
And crush his foes to ruin.

SCENE IV.

TULLIA, ALGINA.

TULLIA.

Gracious heaven!
How much I owe to thy propitious goodness!
My tears have moved thee: all is changed; and now
Thy justice, smiling on my passion, gives
New strength and freedom to the glorious flame.
Fly, my Algina, bring him hither: gods!
Does he avoid me still, or knows he not
His happiness? But stay, perhaps my hopes
Are but delusions all: does Titus hate
The senate thus? alas! and must I owe
That to resentment which is due to love?

ALGINA.

I know the senate have offended him;
That he's ambitious; that he burns for Tullia.

TULLIA.

Then he'll do all to serve me: fly, Algina,
Away, begone.

[*Exit Algina.*

And yet this sudden change
Alarms me: O! what anguish racks my heart!
Now, love, do thou assist and guide my virtue!
My fame, my duty, reason, all command it.
And shall my father owe his crown to me,
Shall Tullia be the chain to bind their friendship;
And all Rome's happiness depend on mine?
O, when shall I impart to thee, my Titus,
The wondrous change we little thought to see,
When shall I hear thy vows, and give thee mine,
Without a pain, a sorrow, or a fear?
My woes are past; now, Rome, I can forgive thee;
If Titus leaves thee, Rome, thou art a slave:
If he is mine, proud senate, thou art no more:
He loves me; tremble therefore, and obey.

SCENE V.

TITUS, TULLIA.

TITUS.

May I believe it? wilt thou deign once more
To look on this abhorred Roman, long
The object of thy hatred, and thy foe?

TULLIA.

The face of things, my lord, is strangely altered;
Fate now permits me——but first tell me, Titus,
Has Tullia still an interest in thy heart?

TITUS.

Alas! thou canst not doubt thy fatal power;
Thou knowest my love, my guilt, and my despair;
And holdest a cruel empire o'er a life

Which I detest; exhaust your rage upon me;
My fate is in your hands.

TULLIA.

Know, mine depends
On thee.

TITUS.

On Titus? never can this trembling heart
Believe it: am I then no longer hated?
Speak on, my Tullia: O, what flattering hope
Thus in a moment lifts me to the height
Of mortal bliss?

TULLIA.

[*Giving him the letter.*
Read this, and make thyself,
Thy Tullia, and her father happy——Now
May I not hope——but wherefore that stern brow
And frowning aspect? gods!

TITUS.

Of all mankind
Titus is sure the most accursed: blind fate,
Bent on my ruin, showed me happiness,
Then snatched it from me: to complete my woes,
It doomed me to adore, and to destroy thee:
I love thee, and have lost thee now forever.

TULLIA.

How, Titus!

TITUS.

Yes; this fatal hour condemns me
To shame and horror: to betray or Rome
Or Tullia: all that's left to my sad choice
Is guilt, or misery.

TULLIA.

What sayest thou, Titus?
When with this hand I offer thee a throne;
Now when thou knowest my heart, for no longer
Will I conceal my virtuous passion for thee;
When duty yields a sanction to our love;
Alas! I thought this happy day would prove
The fairest of my life, and yet the moment
When first my fearful heart, without a blush,
Might own its passion, is the first that calls
For my repentance. Darest thou talk to me
Of guilt and misery? Know, thus to serve
Ungrateful men against their lawful prince,
To scorn my proffered bounties, and oppress me,
These are my miseries, Titus, these thy crimes.
Mistaken youth, weigh in the even balance
What Rome refused, and what she offers thee:
Or deal forth laws, or meanly stoop to obey them:
Be governed by a rabble, or a king;
By Rome, or me: direct him right, ye gods!

TITUS.

[*Giving her back the letter.*

My choice is made.

TULLIA.

And fearest thou to avow it?
Be bold, and speak at once; deserve my pardon,
Or merit my revenge: what's thy resolve?

TITUS.

'Tis to be worthy of thee, of myself,
And of my country; to be just, and faithful;
'Tis to adore and imitate thy virtues;
It is to lose, O Tullia, yet deserve thee.

TULLIA.

Forever then——

TITUS.

Forgive me, dearest Tullia;
Pity my weakness, and forget my love:
Pity a heart foe to itself, a heart
A thousand times more wretched now than even
When thou didst hate me: O! I cannot leave,
I cannot follow thee; I cannot live
Or with thee or without thee; but will die
Rather than see thee given to another.

TULLIA.

My heart's still thine, and I forgive thee, Titus.

TITUS.

If thou dost love me, Tullia, be a Roman;
Be more than queen, and love the commonweal:
Bring with thee patriot zeal, the love of Rome,
And of her sacred laws, be that thy dowry:
Henceforth let Brutus be thy father, Rome
Thy mother, and her loved avenger, Titus,
Thy husband: thus shall Romans yield the palm
Of glory to an Etruscan maid, and owe
Their freedom to the daughter of a king.

TULLIA.

And wouldst thou wish me to betray——

TITUS.

My soul,
Urged to despair, hath lost itself: O no!
Treason is horrible in every shape,
And most unworthy of thee: well I know
A father's rights; his power is absolute,
And must not be disputed: well I know
That Titus loves thee, that he is distracted.

TULLIA.

Thou knowest what duty is, hear then the voice
Of Tullia's father.

TITUS.

And forget my own!
Forget my country!

TULLIA.

Canst thou call it thine
Without thy Tullia?

TITUS.

We are foes by nature;
The laws have laid a cruel duty on us.

TULLIA.

Titus and Tullia foes! how could that word
E'er pass thy lips!

TITUS.

Thou knowest my heart belies them.

TULLIA.

Dare then to serve, and if thou lovest, revenge me.

SCENE VI.

BRUTUS, ARUNS, TITUS, TULLIA, MESSALA, ALBINUS, PROCULUS, LICTORS.

BRUTUS.

[*Addressing himself to Tullia.*

Madam, the time is come for your departure;
Whilst public tumults shook the commonweal,
And the wild tempest howled around us, Rome
Could not restore you to your household gods:

Tarquin himself, in that disastrous hour,
Too busy in the ruin of his people
To think on Tullia, ne'er demanded thee.
Forgive me if I call thus to remembrance
Thy sorrows past: I robbed thee of a father,
And meet it is I prove a father to thee:
Go, princess, and may justice ever guard
The throne which heaven hath called thee to possess!
If thou dost hope obedience from thy subjects,
Obey the laws, and tremble for thyself,
When thou considerest all a sovereign's duty:
And if the fatal powers of flattery e'er
Should from thy heart unloose the sacred bonds
Of justice, think on Rome; remember Tarquin:
Let his example be the instructive lesson
To future kings, and make the world more happy.
Aruns, the senate gives her to thy care;
A father and a husband at your hands
Expect her. Proculus attends you hence,
Far as the sacred gate.

TITUS.

[*Apart.*

Despair, and horror!
I will not suffer it—permit me, sir,

[*Advancing towards Aruns.*

[Brutus *and* Tullia *with their Attendants go out, leaving* Aruns *and* Messala.

Gods! I shall die of grief and shame: but soft,
Aruns, I'd speak with you.

ARUNS.

My lord, the time
Is short; I follow Brutus, and the princess;
Remember, I can put off her departure

But for an hour, and after that, my lord,
'Twill be too late to talk with me; within
We may confer on Tullia's fate, perhaps
On yours.

[*Exit.*

SCENE VII.

TITUS, MESSALA.

O cruel destiny! to join
And then divide us! Were we made, alas!
But to be foes! My friend, I beg thee stop
The tide of grief and rage.

MESSALA.

I weep to see
So many virtues and so many charms
Rewarded thus: a heart like hers deserved
To have been thine, and thine alone.

TITUS.

O no!
Titus and Tullia ne'er shall be united.

MESSALA.

Wherefore, my lord? what idle scruples rise
To thwart your wishes?

TITUS.

The ungenerous laws
She has imposed upon me: cruel maid!
Must I then serve the tyrants I have conquered,
Must I betray the people I had saved?
Shall love, whose power I had so long defied,

At last subdue me thus? Shall I expose
My father to these proud despotic lords!
And such a father, such a fair example
To all mankind, the guardian of his country,
Whom long I followed in the paths of honor,
And might perhaps even one day have excelled;
Shall Titus fall from such exalted virtue
To infamy and vice? detested thought!

MESSALA.

Thou art a Roman, rise to nobler views,
And be a king; heaven offers thee a throne:
Empire and love, and glory, and revenge
Await thee: this proud consul, this support
Of falling Rome, this idol of the people,
If fortune had not crowned him with success,
If Titus had not conquered for his father,
Had been a rebel: thou hast gained the name
Of conqueror, now assume a nobler title;
Now be thy country's friend, and give her peace.
Restore the happy days, when, blessed with freedom,
Not unrestrained by power, our ancestors
Weighed in the even scale, and balanced well
The prince's honors and the people's right:
Rome's hate of kings is not immortal; soon
Would it be changed to love if Titus reigned:
For monarchy, so oft admired, so oft
Detested by us, is the best or worst
Of human governments: A tyrant king
Will make it dreadful, and a good, divine.

TITUS.

Messala, dost thou know me? Dost thou know
I hold thee for a traitor, and myself
Almost as guilty for conversing with thee?

MESSALA.

Know thou, the honor thou contemnest shall soon
Be wrested from thee, and another hand
Perform thy office.

TITUS.

Ha! another! who?

MESSALA.

Thy brother.

TITUS.

Ay! my brother.

MESSALA.

He has given
His faith to Tarquin.

TITUS.

Could Tiberius e'er
Betray his country?

MESSALA.

He will serve his king,
And be a friend to Rome: in spite of thee,
Tarquin will give his daughter to the man
Who shall with warmest zeal defend her father.

TITUS.

Perfidious wretch! thou hast misled my steps,
And left me hanging o'er the precipice;
Left me the dreadful choice or to accuse
My brother, or partake his guilt; but know,
Sooner thy blood——

MESSALA.

My life is in thy power,
Take it this moment; I deserve to die

For striving to oblige you: shed the blood
Of friend, of mistress, and of brother; lay
The breathless victims all before the senate,
And for thy virtues ask the consulship:
Or let me hence, and tell them all I know,
Accuse my fellow-traitors, and myself
Begin the sacrifice.

TITUS.

Messala, stop,
Or dread my desperate rage.

SCENE VIII.

TITUS, MESSALA, ALBINUS.

ALBINUS.

The ambassador
Would see you now, my lord; he's with the princess.

TITUS.

Yes, I will fly to Tullia: O ye gods
Of Rome, ye guardians of my much-loved country!
Pierce this corrupted, this ungrateful heart:
Had Titus never loved, he had been virtuous:
And must I fall a sacrifice to thee,
Detested senate! let us hence.

[*Turning to Messala.*

Thou seest,
Messala, this proud capitol replete
With monuments of Titus' faith.

MESSALA.

'Tis filled
By a proud senate.

TITUS.

Ay: I know it well:
But hark! I hear the voice of angry heaven,
It speaks to me in thunder, and cries, stop,
Ungrateful Titus, thou betrayest thy country:
No, Rome, no, Brutus, I am still thy son:
O'er Titus' head the sun of glory still
Hath shed his brightest rays; he never yet
Disgraced his noble blood: your victim, gods,
Is spotless yet; and if this fatal day
Shall doom me to involuntary crimes,
If I must yield to fate, let Titus die
Whilst he is innocent, and save his country.

End of the Third Act.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

TITUS, ARUNS, MESSALA.

TITUS.

Urge me no more: I've heard too much already:
Shame and despair surround me, but begone,
I am resolved: go, leave me to my sorrows,
And to my virtue: reason pleads in vain,
But Tullia's tears are eloquent indeed:
One look from her will more unman my soul
Than all your tyrant's threats: but never more
Will I behold her; let her go: O heaven!

ARUNS.

I stayed but to oblige you, sir, beyond
The time which you so earnestly requested,
And which we scarce could gain.

TITUS.

Did I request it?

ARUNS.

You did, my lord, and I in secret hoped
A fairer fate would crown your loves; but now
'Tis past; we must not think on't.

TITUS.

Cruel Aruns!
Thou hast beheld my shame, and my disgrace,
Thou hast seen Titus for a moment doubtful:
Thou artful witness of my folly, hence!
And tell thy royal masters all my weakness;
Tell the proud tyrants, that their conqueror,
The son of Brutus, wept before thy face;
But tell them too, that, spite of all my tears,
Spite of thy eloquence, and Tullia's charms,
I yet am free, a conqueror o'er myself:
That, still a Roman, I will never yield
To Tarquin's blood, but swear eternal war
Against the race of her whom I adore.

ARUNS.

Titus, I pity and excuse thy grief;
And, far from wishing to oppress thy heart
With added sorrows, mix my sighs with thine;
Only remember, thou hast killed thy Tullia.
Farewell, my lord.

MESSALA.

O heaven!

SCENE II.

TITUS, MESSALA.

TITUS.

She must not go:
On peril of my life I'll keep her here.

MESSALA.

You would not——

TITUS.

No: I'll not betray my country:
Rome may divide her from me, but she never
Can disunite our fate; I live, and breathe
For Tullia only, and for her will die.
Messala, haste, have pity on my woes,
Gather our troops, assemble all our friends.
Spite of the senate I will stop her; say
She must remain a hostage here at Rome;
I'll do it, Messala.

MESSALA.

To what desperate means
Doth passion urge you? What will it avail
To make this fond avowal of your love?

TITUS.

Go to the senate, and appeal to them,
Try if thou canst not soften the proud hearts
Of these imperious kings. Messala, tell them
The interest of Brutus, of the state——
Alas! I rave, 'tis idle, and all in vain.

MESSALA.

I see you're hurt, my lord, and I will serve you.
I go——

TITUS.

I'll see her: speak to her, Messala,
She passes by this way, and I will take
My last farewell of her.

MESSALA.

You shall.

TITUS.

'Tis she
Now I am lost indeed.

SCENE III.

TITUS, MESSALA, TULLIA, ALGINA.

ALGINA.

Madam, they wait.

TULLIA.

Pity my hard, my cruel fate, Algina;
This base ungrateful man still wounds my heart;
And Brutus, like a vengeful god, appears
To torture us: love, fear and grief, at once
Distract my soul: let us begone.

TITUS.

O no!
Stay, Tullia, deign at least——

TULLIA.

Barbarian, hence!
Thinkest thou with soothing words——

TITUS.

Alas! my Tullia,
I only know in this disastrous hour
What duty bids me do, not what I would:

Reason no longer holds her empire here,
For thou hast torn her from me, and usurpest
The power supreme o'er this distracted mind:
Reign, tyrant, stretch thy cruel power; command
Thy vassal; bid thy Titus rush on guilt;
Dictate his crimes, and make him wretched; No;
Sooner than Titus shall betray his country,
Give up his friends, his fellow citizens,
Those whom his valor saved to fire and slaughter,
Sooner than leave his father to the sword
Of Tarquin, know, proud woman——

TULLIA.

Shield me, heaven!
Thou pleadest the cause of nature, and her voice
Is dear to me as to thyself: thou, Titus,
Taughtest me long since to tremble for a father;
Brutus is mine; our blood united flows:
Canst thou require a fairer pledge than love
And truth have given thee: if I stay with thee,
I am his daughter, and his hostage here.
Canst thou yet doubt? thinkest thou in secret Brutus
Would not rejoice to see thee on a throne?
He hath not placed indeed a diadem
On his own brows, but is he not a king
Beneath another name? and one year's reign
Perhaps may bring——but these are fruitless reasons.
If thou no longer lovest me—one word more,
Farewell: I leave, and I adore thee, Titus:
Thou weepest, thou tremblest; yet a little time
Is left for thee. Speak, tell me, cruel man,
What more canst thou desire?

TITUS.

Thy hatred; that
Alone remains to make me truly wretched.

TULLIA.

It is too much to bear thy causeless plaints;
To hear thee talk of fancied injuries,
With idle dreams of visionary ties:
Take back thy love, take back thy faithless vows,
Worse than thy base refusal: I despise them.
Think not I mean to search in Italy
The fatal grandeur which I sacrificed
To Titus' love, and in another's arms
Lament the weakness which I felt for thee;
My fate's determined: learn, proud Roman, thou
Whose savage virtue rises but to oppress
A helpless woman, coward, when I ask
Thy aid, and only valiant to destroy me,
Fickle and wavering in thy faith, of me
Learn to fulfill thy vows; thou shalt behold
A Woman, in thy eyes however contemned,
However despised, unshaken in her purpose,
And by her firmness see how much she loved thee.
Titus, beneath these walls, the reverend seat
Of my great ancestors, which thou defendest
Against their rightful lord; this fatal spot
Where thou hast dared to insult and to betray me;
Where first thy faithless vows deceived me; there,
Even there, by all the gods who store up vengeance
For perjured men, I swear to thee, O Titus,
This arm, more just than thine, and more resolved,
Shall punish soon my fond credulity,
And wash out all my injuries in my blood:
I go——

TITUS.

No, Tullia, hear and then condemn me;
You shall be satisfied; I fly to please you,
Yet shudder at it: I am still more wretched,

Because my guilty soul has no excuse,
No poor delusion left. I have not even
The joy of self-deceit to soothe my sorrows:
No, thou hast conquered, not betrayed me, Tullia;
I loathe the fatal passion which I feel,
And rush on vice, yet know and honor virtue.
Hate me, avoid me, leave a guilty wretch
Who dies for love, yet hates himself for loving;
Nor fears to mix his future fate with thine,
Midst crimes, and horrors, perjury, and death.

TULLIA.

You know too well your influence o'er my heart;
Mock my fond passion, and insult my love;
Yes, Titus, 'tis for thee alone I live,
For thee would die: yet, spite of all my love,
And all my weakness, death were far more welcome
Than the reluctant hand of cruel Titus,
Who is ashamed to serve his royal master,
And blushes to accept a kingdom from me.
The dreadful hour of separation comes,
Think on it, Titus, and remember well
That Tullia loves, and offers thee a throne.
The ambassador expects me; fare thee well,
Deliberate and determine: an hour hence
Again thou shalt behold me with my father:
When I return to these detested walls
Know, Titus, I'll return a queen, or perish.

TITUS.

Thou shalt not die: I go——

TULLIA.

Stop, Titus, stop;
If thou shouldst follow me, thy life's in danger,
Thou'lt be suspected; therefore stay: farewell;
Resolve to be my murderer, or my husband.

SCENE IV.

TITUS.

[*Alone.*

O Tullia, thou hast conquered, Rome's enslaved:
Return to rule o'er her, and o'er my life,
Devoted to thee: haste, I fly to crown thee,
Or perish in the attempt: the worst of crimes
Were to abandon thee. Now, where's Messala?
My headstrong passion hath at length worn out
His patient friendship; mistress, Romans, friends,
All in one fatal day, hath Titus lost.

SCENE V.

TITUS, MESSALA.

TITUS.

O my Messala, help me in my love,
And my revenge: away; haste, follow me.

MESSALA.

Command, and I obey: my troops are ready
At the Quirinal mount to give us up
The gates, and all my gallant friends have sworn
To acknowledge Titus as the rightful heir
Of Tarquin: lose no time; propitious night
Already offers her kind shade to veil
Our great design.

TITUS.

The hour approaches: Tullia
Will count each minute: Tarquin, after all,

Had my first oaths: away, the die is cast.
[*The lower part of the stage opens and discovers Brutus.*
What do I see; my father!

SCENE VI.

BRUTUS, TITUS, MESSALA, LICTORS.

BRUTUS.

Titus, haste,
Rome is in danger; thou art all our hope:
Secret instructions have been given the senate
That Rome will be attacked at dead of night,
And I have gained for my beloved Titus
The first command, in this extremity
Of public danger. Arm thyself, my son,
And fly, a second time, to save thy country;
Hazard thy life once more in the great cause
Of liberty; or victory or death
Must crown thy days, and I shall envy thee.

TITUS.

O heaven!

BRUTUS.

My son!

TITUS.

To other hands commit
The senate's favors, and the fate of Rome.

MESSALA.

What strange disorder has possessed his soul!

BRUTUS.

Dost thou refuse the proffered glory?

TITUS.

I!

Shall I, my lord—

BRUTUS.

Ha! doth thy heart still burn
With proud resentment of thy fancied wrongs?
Is this a time, my son, for fond caprice?
Can he who saved his country be unhappy?
Immortal honor! will not that suffice
Without the consulship? The laws, thou knowest,
Refused it, Titus, to thy youth alone,
Not to thy merit: think no more of that:
Go; I have placed thee in the post of honor;
Let tyrants only feel thy indignation;
Give Rome thy life; ask nothing in return,
But be a hero; be yet more, my son,
A Roman: I am hastening to the end
Of my short journey; thy victorious hands
Must close my eyes; supported by thy virtues,
My name shall never die; I shall revive
And live once more in Titus: but perhaps
It is decreed that I must follow thee;
Old age is weak; but I will see thee conquer,
Or perish with thee, Rome's avenger still,
Free, and without a master.

TITUS.

O Messala!

SCENE VII.

BRUTUS, VALERIUS, TITUS, MESSALA.

VALERIUS.

My lord, let all retire.

BRUTUS.

[*To Titus.*

Run, fly, my son—

VALERIUS.

Rome is betrayed.

BRUTUS.

What do I hear?

VALERIUS.

There's treason;
We're sold, my lord, the author's yet unknown;
But Tarquin's name is echoed through our streets,
And worthless Romans talk of yielding to him.

BRUTUS.

Ha! would the citizens of Rome be slaves!

VALERIUS.

Yes: the perfidious traitors fled from me;
I've sent in quest of them: much I suspect
Menas and Lælius, the base partisans
Of tyranny and kings, the secret foes
Of Rome, and ever glad to disunite
The senate and the people: if I err not,
Protected by Messala, who himself,
But for his friendship with the noble Titus,
I almost think, has joined them.

BRUTUS.

We'll observe
Their steps with caution; more cannot be done:
The liberty and laws which we defend
Forbid that rigor which I fear is needful;
But to detain a Roman on suspicions
Were to resemble those usurping tyrants
Whom we would punish: let us to the people,
Awake the fearful, give the virtuous praise,

Astonish the perfidious: let the fathers
Of Rome and liberty revive the warmth
Of Roman courage: who will not be bold
When we appear? O rather give us death,
Ye gods! than slavery: let the senate follow.

SCENE VIII.

BRUTUS, VALERIUS, PROCULUS.

PROCULUS.

A slave, my lord, desires a private audience.

BRUTUS.

At this late hour of night!

PROCULUS.

He brings you news,
He says, of highest import.

BRUTUS.

Ha! perhaps
Rome's safety may depend on it: away.
[*To Proculus.*
A moment's loss might hazard all—go thou
And seek my son: let the Quirinal gate
Be his first care: and may the world confess,
When they behold his glorious deeds, the race
Of Brutus was decreed to conquer kings.

End of the Fourth Act.

JUNIUS BRUTUS

ACT V. SCENE I.

BRUTUS, SENATORS, PROCULUS, LICTORS.

VINDEX (*a Slave*).

BRUTUS.

A little more and Tarquin, armed with vengeance,
This night had rushed upon us; Rome had fallen,
And freedom sunk beneath the tyrant's power:
This subtle statesman, this ambassador,
Had opened wide the fatal precipice:
Would you believe it, even the sons of Rome
United to betray her; false Messala
Urged on their furious zeal, and sold his country
To this perfidious Aruns; but kind heaven,
Still watchful o'er the fate of Rome, preserved us.
[*Pointing to Vindex.*
This slave o'erheard it all; his faithful counsels
Awaked my fears, and filled my aged breast
With double vigor: I had seized Messala,
And hoped by tortures to have wrested from him
The names of his associates; but, behold,
Surrounded by my lictors, on a sudden
He from his bosom drew a poniard forth,
Designed no doubt for other purposes,
And cried, if you would know Messala's secrets,
Look for them here, within this bleeding breast;
He who has courage to conspire against you,
Can keep the counsel which he gives, and die:
Then, as tumultuously they gathered round him,
Pierced his false heart, and like a Roman died,
Though he had lived unworthy of the name.

Already Aruns was beyond the walls
Of Rome; our guards pursued him to the camp,
Stopped him with Tullia, and ere long will bring
The traitor here, when heaven, I trust, will soon
Unravel all their dark and deadly purpose.
Valerius will detect them: but remember
Friends, Romans, countrymen, I charge you all,
When ye shall know the names of these vile slaves,
These parricides, nor pardon nor indulgence
Be shown to friends, to brothers, nay to children;
Think on their crimes alone, preserve your faith,
For liberty and Rome demand their blood,
And he who pardons guilt like theirs, partakes it.
[*To the slave.*
Thou, whose blind destiny and lowly birth
Made thee a slave, who shouldst have been a Roman;
Thou, by whose generous aid the senate lives,
And Rome is safe, receive that liberty
Thou hast bestowed; henceforth let nobler thoughts
Inspire thy soul; be equal to my sons,
The dread of tyrants, the delight of Rome.
But whence this tumult? Hark!

PROCULUS.

The ambassador
Is seized, my lord, and they have brought him hither.

BRUTUS.

How will he dare———

SCENE II.

BRUTUS, SENATORS, ARUNS, LICTORS.

ARUNS.

How long, insulting Romans,
Will you thus violate the sacred rights
Of all mankind? How long by faction led
Thus in their ministers dishonor kings?
Your lictors have with insolence detained me:
Is it my master you thus treat with scorn,
Or Aruns? Know, my rank respectable
In every nation———

BRUTUS.

The more sacred that,
More guilty thou: talk not of titles here.

ARUNS.

A king's ambassador——

BRUTUS.

Thou art not one:
Thou are a traitor, with a noble name,
Emboldened by impunity: for know
That, true ambassadors interpret laws,
But never break them; serve their king, but ne'er
Dishonor him; with them reposed in safety
Lie the firm ties of faith 'twixt man and man;
And of their holy ministry the fruit
Is grateful peace: they are the sacred bonds
That knit the sovereigns of the earth together;
And, as the friends of all, by all revered.
Ask thy own heart if thou art such; thou darest
not:

But if thy master bade thee learn our laws,
Our virtues, and our treasures, we will teach thee
Now what Rome is, and what a Roman senate:
Will teach thee that this people still respects
The law of nations, which thou hast dishonored:
The only punishment inflicted on thee,
Shall be to see thy vile associates bleed,
And tell thy king their folly and their fate.
When thou returnest, be sure inform thy friends
Of Rome's resentment, and thy own disgrace:
Lictors, away with him.

SCENE III.

BRUTUS, VALERIUS, PROCULUS, SENATORS.

Well, my Valerius,
They're seized, I hope, at least you know the traitors:
Ha! wherefore is that melancholy gloom
Spread o'er thy face, presaging greater ills?
Thou tremblest too.

VALERIUS.

Remember thou art Brutus.

BRUTUS.

Explain thyself.

VALERIUS.

I dare not speak it: take
[*Gives him the tablets.*
These tablets, read, and know the guilty.

BRUTUS.

Ha!

My eyes deceive me; sure it cannot be!
O heavy hour! and most unhappy father!
My son! Tiberius! pardon me, my friends,
Unlooked for misery! Have you seized the traitor?

VALERIUS.

My lord, with two of the conspirators,
He stood on his defence, and rather chose
To die than yield himself a prisoner: close
By them he fell all covered o'er with wounds:
But O there still remains a tale more dreadful
For thee, for Rome, and for us all.

BRUTUS.

What is it?

VALERIUS.

Once more, my lord, look on that fatal scroll
Which Proculus had wrested from Messala.

BRUTUS.

I tremble, but I will go on: ha! Titus!
[*He sinks into the arms of Proculus.*

VALERIUS.

Disarmed I found him, wandering in despair
And horror, as if conscious of a crime
Which he abhorred.

BRUTUS.

Return, ye conscript fathers,
Straight to the senate; Brutus hath no place
Amongst you now: go, pass your judgment on him,
Exterminate the guilty race of Brutus;
Punish the father in the blood of him

Who was my child: I shall not follow you,
Or to suspend or mitigate the wrath
Of injured Rome.

SCENE IV.

BRUTUS.

[*Alone.*

Great gods! to your decrees
I yield submissive, to the great avengers
Of Rome, and of her laws: by you inspired
I reared the structure of fair liberty
On justice and on truth; and will you now
O'erthrow it? will you arm my children's hands
Against your own work? Was it not woe enough
That fierce Tiberius, blind with furious zeal,
Should serve the tyrant, and betray his country?
But that my Titus too, the joy of Rome,
Who, full of honor, but this very day
Enjoyed a triumph for his victories,
Crowned in the capitol by Brutus' hand,
Titus, the hope of my declining years,
The darling of mankind, that Titus——gods!

SCENE V.

BRUTUS, VALERIUS, LICTORS, ATTENDANTS.

VALERIUS.

My lord, the senate has decreed, yourself
Should pass the sentence on your guilty son.

BRUTUS.

Myself!

VALERIUS.

It must be so.

BRUTUS.

Touching the rest,
Say, what have they determined?

VALERIUS.

All condemned
To death; even now perhaps they are no more.

BRUTUS.

And has the senate left to my disposal
The life of Titus?

VALERIUS.

They esteem this honor
Due to thy virtues.

BRUTUS.

O my country!

VALERIUS.

What
Must I return in answer to the senate?

BRUTUS.

That Brutus knows the value of a favor
He sought not, but shall study to deserve.
But could my son without resistance yield?
Could he——forgive my doubts, but Titus ever
Was Rome's best guard, and still I feel I love him.

VALERIUS.

Tullia, my lord———

BRUTUS.

Well, what of her?

VALERIUS.

Confirmed
Our just suspicions.

BRUTUS.

How!

VALERIUS.

Soon as she saw,
In her return, the dreadful preparation
Of torture for the offenders, at our feet
She fell, and soon in agonies expired;
The last poor victim of the hated race
Of tyrants: doubtless 'twas for her, my lord,
Rome was betrayed: I feel a father's grief,
And weep for Brutus; but in her last moments
This way she turned her eyes, and called on Titus.

BRUTUS.

Just gods!

VALERIUS.

Thou art his judge, perform thy office,
Or strike, or spare; acquit him, or condemn;
Rome will approve what Brutus shall determine.

BRUTUS.

Lictors, bring Titus hither.

VALERIUS.

I retire,
And trust thy virtue; my astonished soul
Admires and pities thee: I go to tell
The senate, naught can equal Brutus' grief
But Brutus' firmness.

SCENE VI.

BRUTUS, PROCULUS.

BRUTUS.

No: the more I think,
The less can I believe my son could e'er
Conspire with traitors to betray his country:
No: he loved Rome too well; too well he loved
His father: sure we cannot thus forget
Our duty and ourselves in one short day:
I cannot think my son was guilty still.

PROCULUS.

'Twas all conducted by Messala; he
Perhaps designed to shelter his own crimes
Beneath the name of Titus; his accusers
Envy his glory, and would fain obscure it.

BRUTUS.

O! would to heaven it were so!

PROCULUS.

He's thy son,
Thy only hope; and innocent or guilty,
The senate has to thee resigned his fate:
His life is safe whilst in the hands of Brutus;
Thou wilt preserve a great man for his country;
Thou art a father.

BRUTUS.

No: I am Rome's consul.

SCENE VII.

BRUTUS, PROCULUS, TITUS.

[*At the farther end of the stage, guarded by Lictors.*

PROCULUS.

He comes.

TITUS.

[*Advancing.*

'Tis Brutus: O distressful sight!
Open, thou earth, beneath my trembling steps!
My lord, permit a son——

BRUTUS.

Rash boy, forbear:
I was the father of two children once,
And loved them both; but one is lost: what sayest thou?
Speak, Titus, have I yet a son?

TITUS.

O no:
Thou hast not.

BRUTUS.

Answer then thy judge, thou shame
To Brutus; say, didst thou betray thy country,
Give up thy father to a tyrant's power,
And break thy solemn vows? Didst thou resolve
To do this, Titus?

TITUS.

I resolved on nothing.
Filled with a deadly poison that possessed
My frantic mind, I did not know myself,

Nor do I yet; and my distempered soul,
In its wild rage, was for a moment guilty;
That moment clothed me with eternal shame,
And made me false to what I loved, my country:
'Tis past; and anguish and remorse succeed
To avenge their wrongs, and scourge me for the crime.
Pronounce my sentence: Rome, that looks upon thee,
Wants an example, and demands my life:
By my deserved fate she may deter
Those of her sons, if any such there be,
Who might be tempted to a crime like mine.
In death at least thus shall I serve my country;
Thus shall my blood, which never till this hour
Was stained with guilt, still flow for liberty.

BRUTUS.

Unnatural mixture! perfidy and courage;
Such horrid crimes with such exalted virtue!
With all thy dear-bought laurels on thy brow,
What power malignant could inspire thee thus
With vile inconstancy?

TITUS.

The thirst of vengeance,
Ambition, hatred, madness; all united——

BRUTUS.

Go on, unhappy youth.

TITUS.

One error more,
And worse than all the rest; one cruel flame;
That fired my guilt, and still perhaps augments it,
Completed my destruction: to confess it
Is double shame, to Rome of little service,

And most unworthy of us both: I own it:
But I have reached the summit of my guilt,
And of my sorrows too: end with my life
My crimes, and my despair, my shame and thine.
[*Kneeling.*
But if in battle I have ever traced
Thy glorious steps; if I have followed thee,
And served my country; if remorse and anguish
Already have o'erpaid my crimes; O deign
Within thy arms once more to hold a wretch
Abandoned and forlorn: O say, at least,
"My son, thy father hates thee not": that word
Alone my fame and virtue shall restore,
And save my memory from the brand of shame.
The world will say, when Titus died, a look
From you relieved him from his load of grief,
And made him full amends for all his sorrows;
Spite of his guilt, that still esteemed by thee,
He bore thy blessing with him to the grave.

BRUTUS.

O Rome! his pangs oppress me: O my country!
Proculus, see they lead my son to death.
Rise, wretched Titus, thou wert once the hope
Of my old age, my best support; embrace
Thy father who condemned thee; 'twas his duty.
Were he not Brutus, he had pardoned thee;
Believe my tears that trickle down thy cheeks
Whilst I am speaking to thee: O my Titus,
Let nobler courage than thy father shows
Support thee in thy death; my son, farewell:
Let no unmanly tears disgrace thy fall,
But be a Roman still, and let thy country,
That knows thy worth, admire while she destroys thee.

TITUS.

Farewell: I go to death; in that at least
Titus once more shall emulate his father.

SCENE VIII.

BRUTUS, PROCULUS.

PROCULUS.

My lord, the senate, with sincerest grief,
And shuddering at the dreadful stroke——

BRUTUS.

No more:
Ye know not Brutus who condole with him
At such a time: Rome only is my care;
I feel but for my country: we must guard
Against more danger: they're in arms again:
Away: let Rome in this disastrous hour
Supply the place of him whom I have lost
For her, and let me finish my sad days,
As Titus should have done, in Rome's defence.

SCENE the LAST.

BRUTUS, PROCULUS, A SENATOR.

SENATOR.

My lord———

BRUTUS.

My son is dead?

SENATOR.

'Tis so: these eyes—

BRUTUS.

Thank heaven! Rome's free; and I am satisfied.

END.

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